



## ***HYPERCULTURA***

***<https://litere.hyperion.ro/hypercultura/>***

**ONLINE ACADEMIC JOURNAL**

**DEPARTMENT OF LETTERS AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

**HYPERION UNIVERSITY, BUCHAREST**

**E-ISSN: 2559-2025**

**(CEEOL, ULRICHSWEB)**

**Use and Abuse: From Alcohol Addiction to Modern Media Intoxication**

## Editorial Board

**Sorina GEORGESCU**– editor-in-chief- Hyperion University

Sandra Lucia ISTRATE – editorial assistant – Hyperion University

Andreea SION – MEMBER- HYPERION UNIVERSITY

Felix NICOLAU– MEMBER – The Technical University of Constructions, Bucharest

## Advisory Board

Christopher BIGSBY– University of East Anglia

Francois BRUNET– Université Paris Diderot

Maureen Daly GOGGIN– Arizona State University

Carmen FLYS-JUNQUERA– Universidad de Alcala

Asuncion LOPEZ-VARELA AZCARATE– Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Carolyn KRAUS– University of Michigan-Dearborn

Rob KROES– University of Amsterdam

Barbara NELSON – University of Bucharest, University of Michigan

Ileana ORLICH– Arizona State University

Dominique SIPIERE – Université Paris-Ouest Defense

Shahzaman HAQUE– Institute National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales

Sahoo KALYANAMALINI– University of Antwerp

Ferit KILICKAYA– Mehmet Akif Ersoy University

## CONTENTS

**Tony LACK** (Alamo Colleges, Texas)

Addiction to Boredom in Arthur Schopenhauer, Martin Heidegger and *William Lovell*, an Epistolary Novel by Ludwig Tieck.....4

**Adriana GHIȚOI** (Hyperion University, Bucharest)

Addiction to/in Ion Luca Caragiale: Buddies, Chit-Chat, Beer Houses, Coffee Houses.....16

**Estella CIOBANU and Patricia ȘOITU** (Ovidius University of Constanța)

Addiction & Moralization: Drugs, Alcohol, Sex and God-Power in Sarah Kane's *Cleansed*, Marc Schölermann's *Pathology* and Alex Garland's *Ex Machina*.....27

**Wojciech KLEPUSZEWSKI** (Koszalin University of Technology, Poland)

Literary Alcoholics: Debunking the Myth.....41

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Manisha BHATTACHARYA** (Raja Peary Mohan College, Uttarpara, India)

Book Review: *The Red-Haired Woman* by Orhan Pamuk .....47

**Wojciech KLEPUSZEWSKI** (Koszalin University of Technology, Poland)

Book Review: *Pięćdziesiątka* by Inga Iwasiów.....50

Tony Lack  
Allamo Colleges, Texas

## Addiction to Boredom in Arthur Schopenhauer, Martin Heidegger and *William Lovell*, an Epistolary Novel by Ludwig Tieck

**Abstract:** With the work of philosophers Arthur Schopenhauer and Martin Heidegger forming the theoretical basis, and Ludwig Tieck's Romantic novel, *William Lovell*, as the literary source, this paper addresses the following questions: What is boredom and what functions does it perform for those who experience it? Is time spent in boredom always a waste of time or can it be existentially significant? Can the mood of boredom become habit forming or addictive? The argument presented here suggests that the answer is yes, boredom can become an addiction, for a number of reasons. Boredom is a distraction from deeper sources of suffering. Boredom can function ideologically, providing a rationalization for human behaviors that seem to have no meaning. Boredom is similar to nostalgia, since it often functions as a means to escape from the present. Remaining in states of shallow boredom can prevent slipping into the more existentially significant form of profound boredom. Profound boredom is the type of boredom that can awaken us to our lives and force us to reckon with ourselves. This is a challenge, and to avoid that challenge we can become subconsciously addicted to the shallower form of boredom

**Keywords:** Schopenhauer, Heidegger, Ludwig Tieck, Romanticism, boredom, mood

### Introduction

"I'm bored!" One hears this expression issuing from the mouths of teenagers and sees it popping up on screens in the most affluent nations of the world; nations where leisure time has expanded dramatically and the cost of entertainment has declined precipitously. In pedagogical seminars and conferences, we listen to experts discuss boredom as a predictor of low student engagement and performance. Employers are concerned about the effects of boredom on workplace productivity (Martin 123). The burgeoning happiness industry and the gurus of positive psychology seek to combat boredom by encouraging life engagement in their prescriptions for lifelong flourishing (Seligman, 2001). And yet the mantra, "I'm bored," drones on.

A substantial amount of psychological research has been devoted to the problem of boredom, precisely because boredom is often identified as a cause of a number of addictive behaviors, including drug abuse, cigarette smoking, gambling, and addiction to pornography (Farmer and Sundberg, 1986). Boredom has even been linked to a variety of seriously destructive behaviors, such as vandalism, risky sexual activity, and homicide (Pickhardt, 2013).

However, some of the most illuminating reflections on boredom and addiction are found in philosophy, especially phenomenology and in modern fiction (Bargdill, 2000). In philosophy, Arthur Schopenhauer, Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus have plumbed the depths of boredom, while writers of fiction such as Samuel Beckett, Knut Hamsun, Michel Houellebecq, and Ludwig Tieck have provided us with entire narratives developed around the theme of boredom. With the present investigation, I aim to combine philosophy and literature, although not forgetting psychology entirely, in order to obtain a fresh perspective on the matter and answer the following questions: What is boredom and what functions does it perform for those of us who experience it? Is time spent in boredom always a waste of time or can it be existentially significant? This question revolves around the assumption that there

are different levels of boredom, ranging from dalliance and distraction to despair and angst. The final question is whether one can become addicted to boredom. While previous research suggests that being bored can lead to addictive behaviors, my question is whether the mood of boredom can become habit forming or addictive. I argue that the answer is yes, boredom can become an addiction, for a number of reasons.

First, boredom is a distraction from deeper sources of suffering. Being preoccupied with boredom may be a way to protect ourselves from deeper sources of pain. Boredom is predictable and safe. It is less painful than many forms of suffering, it can become a routine, and this can provide ontological security. Perhaps the routine of boredom, and boring routines, are meaningless, but sometimes routines provide order and security without deeper meaning. When a person is habitually bored, he/she always knows how to feel, how to react, and how to deal with the radical contingency of the future.

Second, the mood of boredom can function ideologically, providing an individualized explanation to questions that emerge from time to time in all of our lives about just why we are pursuing a certain set of behaviors. While the oppressive social and economic structures and processes that encourage these boring routines might be to blame, those structures and processes are also hard to criticize, change, or escape from. If one accepts that large stretches of everyday life are supposed to be boring, or that being bored is a psychological problem, rather than a social or economic issue, then those who benefit from maintaining the oppressive structures also benefit from the boredom of the oppressed.

If we have entered the end of history and we are now in the era of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Last Man*, characterized in part by relatively safe and comfortable lives that play out amidst long stretches of boredom which are temporarily alleviated by binge drinking, shopping, television, and eating, then perhaps boredom functions ideologically in two specific ways. First, boredom is the new opiate of the people, the sigh of the oppressed, a void that waits to be filled, a form of suspended animation that makes life tolerable in between binges of passive pleasure and the drudgery of work. Second, in any imperfect society, there are certain things that we are not supposed to say or think, and our words and thoughts must be channeled so that we are not able to say or think these things. The ideological structure or system that performs this function has been called an 'episteme' or a discourse (Michelle Foucault), a 'problematic' (Louis Althusser), or a horizon (Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer). It is a particular organization of categories, concepts, and expressions that forms the limit of what we are able to say at any given moment in history. Within this structure we are encouraged to repeat and restate what is already known in a manner that feels natural, spontaneous, and free. We are also invited to *feel* a certain way about the predicaments in our lives because the moods that come over us and the language we have available to describe these moods are framed by the ideological structure.

For example, the language and mood of boredom enables us to be dissatisfied, but constrains us from changing the circumstances that are responsible for the boredom. In this sense, boredom is similar to amnesia or intoxication, allowing us to drift in an unreflective mode. Boredom allows us to act without choosing or affirming, and to become aware of the world around us while remaining numb. Even those most committed to the work and everyday routines they have chosen occasionally become bored. Boredom serves as a temporary rest from the pressure of relentless optimism. For others, boredom is a way to deal with a socioeconomic predicament that seems impossible to change. As a method of everyday coping, boredom can be habit forming and can, to paraphrase Pierre Bourdieu, become part of the human habitus, generating a set of expectations about how life's circumstances are supposed to feel, and reproducing that feeling as a way to keep drifting. After all, life is not supposed to be all fun and games.

Third, boredom is similar to nostalgia, since it often functions as a means to escape from the present. This type of boredom also undermines our belief in the future. When we are bored with the present and look back nostalgically, we stop desiring and willing. Failing to engage the present, dreaming of an imaginary past, and avoiding the future can become a form of learned helplessness that we become

addicted to. With no forward momentum, we wait for something to happen to us, for someone to entertain us.

Fourth, remaining in periods of shallow boredom, described above as mere dalliance or distraction, can be a way to avoid falling into what Heidegger called profound boredom. Profound boredom is the type of boredom that can awaken us to the way we are living our lives and force us to reckon with ourselves. This is a challenge, and to avoid that challenge we might be subconsciously addicted to the shallower form of boredom, putting things off, *ad infinitum*. Boredom helps create a protective cocoon that shelters us from thinking about or addressing the deeper sources of discontent. Life may be dull, but in this sense, boredom is bliss.

### Arthur Schopenhauer: Living Between Pain, Frustration, and Boredom

“The two foes of human happiness are pain and boredom.”  
(Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Wisdom of Life*)

Arthur Schopenhauer pointed out that the temporal dimension of human existence makes us all vulnerable to dissatisfaction and boredom. This is because striving after happiness is more fulfilling than attaining it. Our powers and skills satisfy us in and through their active use, rather than in their fulfillment. To live in the constant expectation of happiness is to blind ourselves to the pleasure and fulfillment of the present. When we arrive at the destination or achieve the goal, the willful striving is terminated, and the pleasure diminishes. As soon as we obtain what we want, our experience becomes anticlimactic and we begin to dream of something yet to come or to reminisce about something that we once had or did. We look back into the past for the satisfaction we expected to find in the future: “The scenes of our life resemble a rough mosaic; they are ineffective from close up and have to be viewed from a distance if they are to run beautifully. That is why to attain something desired is to discover how vain it is; and why, though we live all our lives in expectation of better things, we often at the same time long regretfully for what is past” (*The Wisdom of Life* 48).

How can we escape from this quandary? For Schopenhauer, the existential pessimist *par excellence*, there simply is no escape. Life, for the most part, is tragically painful and tragically boring. Schopenhauer did think that artistic contemplation, becoming completely absorbed in the object of contemplation, could temporarily suspend the endless striving of the will, allowing us to escape from suffering and boredom (Lack 2-15). Yet, it is the “genius” alone who is capable of achieving this level of absorption in contemplative activity:

Genius is the capacity to remain in perception, to remove from the service of the will the knowledge which originally existed only for this service. In other words, genius is the ability to leave entirely out of sight our own interest, our willing, and our aims, and consequently to discard entirely our own personality for a time, in order to remain pure knowing subject, the clear eye of the world. (Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* 36)

We might consider analogues of the life of the genius as one avenue into the question of how to relieve boredom. For example, there is a parallel between Schopenhauer’s idea of becoming “absorbed entirely in the object” and mystical experiences, forms of intoxication, and sexual intimacy. In these states, suffering and boredom disappear, but only while the ecstasy endures. There is also a body of research in positive psychology initiated by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi that investigates the experiential state of “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In a state of flow, mind and body are absorbed in the activity, we forget ourselves and gain an intensified awareness of the present. Flow is addictive, and when we consider the characteristic features, we can see why. There are clear goals every step of the way. There is immediate



feedback to one's actions. Action and awareness are merged. Distractions are excluded from consciousness. There is no worry of failure. Self-consciousness disappears. The sense of time becomes distorted. The activity becomes an end in itself.<sup>1</sup> The similarities between "flow," intoxication, mystical ecstasy, and sexual intimacy are obvious. However, achieving a state of flow does not just happen, it requires immersion in an activity at a level of intensity and focus that calls forth and challenges our skills and abilities. Getting to this level requires knowledge, motivation, technical skill, and constant practice: "The best moments in our lives are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times. The best moments usually occur if a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile" (Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow* 3).

These best moments emerge when we are involved in pursuits that activate skills in a manner that is neither frustrating nor too easy. For example, on a scale of one to ten, if ten is impossible and five is fairly easy, the level of skill engagement in the activity should be about seven. Best moments become worthwhile when they are assembled in a meaningful context. The more often we achieve a state of flow, the richer and deeper our activities and lives become. Time merges with the activities and we become one with our activity. As we repeat this experience and intensify it, our lives begin to assume the form of an existential project rather than a series of transient events that we can only dream about or hope for.

However, as we shall see, there are those with mental powers, cultural resources, and ample leisure time, such as the Romantic anti-hero William Lovell, who lack the willpower and conviction to make their activities significantly difficult and worthwhile. These people become dilettantes and their mental gifts eventually produce cynicism and boredom. Without commitment, the unconventional genius becomes a rootless bohemian or a nostalgic dreamer.

### **Martin Heidegger: Falling into Boredom and Passing the Time**

Every experience or encounter or perception necessarily conceals and temporarily closes off other experiences and perceptions. In this manner, existence and reality are always partly concealed from us. One way of being-in-the-world crowds out other possibilities. The nature of any experience is such that it feels and appears in *this* way and not in *other* possible ways. Moods are an essential part of our experiences, encounters, and perceptions. Being caught up in a mood is a form of attunement. The German word for attunement is *Befindlichkeit*, which means, *how do you find yourself?* We are always attuned, or tuned in, to ourselves, others, and the world around us through moods. Heidegger says that moods are disclosive, moods color our world and bring experience to light in a certain way. Moods themselves are initially very hard to grasp. They are always with us and yet they conceal themselves because they are part of the conditions of possibility for any experience at all. We can only describe a mood after it has come over us:

When we master a mood, we do so by way of a counter-mood; we are never free of moods ... only because the "there" has already been disclosed in a state-of-mind can immanent reflection come across "experiences" at all. The "bare mood" discloses the "there" more primordially, but correspondingly it closes it off more stubbornly than any not-perceiving". (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 175)

A mood such as wonder moods fills us up, enchants our surroundings, and makes time fly, while boredom empties us, disenchanting our surroundings, and makes time drag. From within the mood of boredom, everything comes to light differently. To be bored is to be situated in the world differently than to be joyful, or hopeful, or anxious. We can become so accustomed to a mood that it becomes an unconscious habit, and before we understand it, we are in a predicament of sorts.

<sup>1</sup> For a general introduction to the topic of "flow" and the primary research, see, *The Pursuit of Happiness*. [www.pursuit-of-happiness.org/history-of-happiness/mihaly-csikszentmihalyi/](http://www.pursuit-of-happiness.org/history-of-happiness/mihaly-csikszentmihalyi/)

It is well known that in *Being and Time* Heidegger identified *Angst* or anxiety as the fundamental mood that reveals the way we encounter the finitude of existence, death, as our ultimate possibility. In this sense, nothingness is the ultimate human truth. However, in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, Heidegger identified and analyzed boredom as a fundamental mood. In this text, which was given as a lecture course in 1929-30, Heidegger claimed that boredom is the concealed destination of the modern scientific era. Boredom is the mood that reveals the essence of the technological age and its tendency toward trivia, tedium, repetition, and recombination.

In boredom, our existence is made manifest as being left empty and held in limbo. Being left empty “means to be offered nothing by what is at hand” (Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts* 103). Everything around us is closed off, or refused. When we are held in limbo, we are painfully aware of time dragging on. The duration of actual time does not matter, what matters is that we feel time as an oppressive weight, bearing down on us. In boredom, the world is drained of meaning because meaning requires an engagement with our surroundings and a sense of where we are going in time. When time drags, our experience is like being bound by time itself. The German word for boredom is *Langeweile*, a long while. Boredom is a mood in which we are neither active nor passive but simply held captive by time and by our surroundings. In this indistinct fog we are unable to gain a sense of direction or purpose. It is hard for us to say precisely *why* we feel this way, because when boredom pervades our world, we become identical with what bores us. The power, and perhaps the appeal of boredom, is its capacity to blur distinctions and its refusal to show itself. Boredom is a form of escapism, suspending and numbing our interaction with the world. We cannot affirm or reject anything, or give it value or priority. Therefore, we cannot be responsible for anything or committed to anything.

Contrast the mood of boredom and its empty, dragging temporality with what it feels like to be engaged in an active pursuit, to be happily in the zone. We do not sense time at all. We become fully immersed in our activity and in the time of our activity. Our commitment to our activity and to the meaning of it do not have to be chosen or seized. Instead, we are bound and committed in-and-through our action: “Being occupied gives our dealings with things a certain manifoldness, direction, fullness. But not only that: we are also taken by things, if not altogether lost in them, and often captivated by them ... when we get hold of something that occupies us, we scarcely have time for anything else” (Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts* 101).

Conversely, in boredom we become aware of time dragging and try to make it move faster by ‘killing time.’ We often try to kill time by counting it and watching it, as if each minute we take note of has been devoured, shortening the duration of time that we have yet to endure. Or we try to kill time by ‘filling it up’ with distractions. But this often just reinforces the boredom. We cannot really consume time and the more we try to do so the more apparent time’s burden becomes. When we seek escape from boredom through distraction, we can fall prey to other modes of existing that pervade everyday life, which Heidegger identified as “idle talk, curiosity, ambiguity, and tranquilization” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 203-220). He claimed, “Idle talk is constituted by just such gossiping and passing the word along—a process by which its initial lack of grounds to stand on becomes aggravated to complete groundlessness” (*Being and Time* 211).

In average everyday social interaction, idle talk is often unavoidable. It becomes a problem when it goes unrecognized to the extent that it “develops an undifferentiated kind of intelligibility” and “releases one from the task of genuinely understanding” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 214). When this occurs, we can float in a groundlessness in which “the uncanniness of this floating remains hidden” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 214).

Similar to idle talk, “curiosity” is just a concern to see, to look, to know, perhaps even to possess, without really grasping the meaning of anything or even caring to: “It seeks novelty only in order to leap from it anew to another novelty. It seeks restlessness and the excitement of continual novelty and



changing encounters. In not tarrying, curiosity is concerned with the possibility of distraction" (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 216).

Heidegger suggested that when idle talk and curiosity come to predominate, everything becomes ambiguous. From within the mood of ambiguity, who can tell what is true and what is false? Who can tell what is good and what is bad? Who can tell what is right and what is wrong when everything becomes a matter of idle talk and curiosity? Everything becomes indeterminate, everything a matter for the bored shoulder shrug.

Heidegger construed idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity as inherently tempting, because they allow us to tranquilize ourselves as we seek the comfort of the familiar, however boring it may be. The tranquility of boredom allows us to hide from our own possibilities, and from the future that is coming toward us, which ends in death. It is important to point out that Heidegger described several different forms of boredom. The shallow form of boredom that we all fall prey to, which is related to idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity, has a tendency to conceal a deeper form of boredom. This deeper form of boredom, which Heidegger calls profound boredom, plays a role similar to that which Angst plays in Heidegger's other writings. In its shallow form, boredom is simply a way to kill time as time drags along. We exist by dawdling with one thing or another, "seeking to be occupied in a particular way with something arbitrary" (Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts* 131). Conversely, profound boredom produces a different relation to time and to the world around us. We find ourselves in a mood of "floating dissipation" and in a "realm of power over which the individual person, the public individual subject, no longer has any power" (Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts* 131). In the same way that Angst comes over us suddenly, from nowhere, and brings our finitude to light, profound boredom "makes everything of equally great and equally little worth" (Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts* 137). No particular thing or experience can satisfy our desires. In the shallow form of boredom, our desire still remains, albeit in a muted form, and it propels us forward slowly in time, from one meaningless thing to another, holding us in limbo. This is a blasé attitude to be sure, but one where we are still involved with time and with the world. In profound boredom we have no desire and we have nothing to do to pass the time. Time does not drag along, it simply halts and we are turned back upon ourselves. We experience a "telling refusal" of the meaning and value of everything<sup>2</sup>: "In this boredom the beings that surround us offer us no possibility of acting and no further possibility of doing anything" (Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts* 139).

Yet by closing off all desiring and willing, profound boredom offers a moment of clear vision, out of which a new range of possibilities might eventually present themselves to us. At the still point where there is no desire, no time, no meaning, and no way to distract ourselves from our existential guilt, we might awaken to the silent call of conscience and resolve to define and choose our own possibilities. We might retrieve our past in light of a future that we open ourselves to and allow to come toward us. Needless to say, allowing profound boredom to overpower us, even for a moment, is frightening and difficult, which is why we can become addicted to the shallower form of boredom. We prefer an "uneasy fidgeting that is directed outward" (Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts* 128) because it displaces our guilt and protects us from confronting the radical contingency of our lives.

### **Boredom in William Lovell**

The novel, *William Lovell* was written in the early years of the Romantic era (1793), yet it is surprisingly relevant. We might want to refer to our era as "Neo-Romantic" rather than "postmodern" because the central themes in Romanticism, re-invigorated and intensified by consumer capitalism and global digital media, have returned (Campbell, 1987). Consider, for example, the current emphasis on self-expression, transgressing boundaries, reinventing personal and cultural identity, as well as the centrality

<sup>2</sup> *Nausea*, by Jean Paul Sartre contains an extended analysis of precisely this mood and its effects.

of what Freud termed the narcissism of small differences. In Romantic and Neo-Romantic eras, we see a need to discover, invent, exaggerate, and celebrate differences in order to preserve a feeling of uniqueness. Consumer culture, a big part of the contemporary Neo-Romantic landscape, thrives on and reproduces the narcissism of small differences and promotes strategies of status distinction and branding that conceal the underlying monotony of everyday life, providing us with things to think about, evaluate, and purchase while avoiding a confrontation with more substantial issues.

In both Romanticism and Neo-Romanticism, history becomes heritage. In the nineteenth century, largely under the influence of Johann Gottfried Herder, the value of local customs, traditions, language, and ethnic background was discovered, invented, and celebrated. Today, we can add gender and sexual identity, music-based subcultures, people who love and hate meat, and any number of groups structured around niche lifestyles to this quest for self-identity, self-expression, and self-determination. The fetishization of each and every minor difference and the proliferating demand that every form of self-expression is to be celebrated has produced cynicism and boredom. Nothing is interesting when everything is equally significant, and when one thing is as good as any of the many other things, we tend to observe with indifference, as Heidegger seems to have predicted through his *angst*. Neo-Romantic culture also produces an expectation that we have a right to be entertained by someone or something as well as a duty to be offended by boring people, places, and things. So, we are never entertained for long and always predisposed to boredom. As Balder, a friend of William's, exclaimed, "The spirit thirsts for the new, one object must replace another ... and what does it turn out to be except the boring repetition of one and the same thing?" (Tieck, Pt. III 21).

The novel exhibits all of the elements of Romanticism; powerful emotions, interiority, projected flights of fancy, sublime and pseudo-sublime experiences, worship of nature, rejection of reason and social conventions, an emphasis on childlike wonder, and a rejection of the wisdom of the elders. The epistolary form is especially conducive to highlighting the sudden, extreme, shifts in mood and sensibility which simply "overcome" many of the characters, especially young William Lovell.

The novel is developed around a series of letters exchanged between complementary personalities. The young Romantics are William Lovell and his friend Edward Burton. Their letters reflect and reinforce their narcissism, cynicism, and boredom. Another pair, Charles Wilmont and his friend Mortimer, are well adjusted, balanced, and pragmatic. Although William Lovell and Edward Burton view them as conventional sellouts, Charles and Mortimer are just realistic and reflective about social life. They have measured the world's possibilities and they face life realistically, taking their pleasures in the proper doses while remaining wary of the dangers of unbounded enthusiasm. They maintain a sense of balanced fulfillment and avoid the pitfalls of cynicism and boredom. Mortimer to Charles Wilmont:

There is something inherently superficial in the so-called pleasure-seeking way of life, a certain prosiness, that often puts me quite vividly in the mind of the boredom of Tantalus. I am therefore at present keeping myself more withdrawn from such company; I am more often alone and—you will perhaps laugh—I have often begun to recommence my studies and to recollect what I have learned in the course of my travels. (Tieck, Pt. I 14).

Mortimer realizes that the passive consumption of pleasure is superficial and invariably leads to boredom. So, he pursues active leisure, study, and recollection, going back over his experiences and savoring them in Proustian reflection, as idealized pictures of the most meaningful aspects of his life.

The reference to Tantalus is important as it relates directly to Schopenhauer's position on boredom. Tantalus was cast by Zeus into eternal punishment in Tartarus, the bottom of the Underworld, for stealing nectar and ambrosia from the gods, for revealing their secrets, and for chopping up Zeus's grandson, Pelops, boiling him, and trying to serve him to the gods at banquet. In one rendition of the myth, Tantalus was cursed with eternal deprivation. He was forced to stand in a pool of cool refreshing water beneath a

fruit tree whose low hanging branches were full of ripe fruit. When he reached for the fruit, the branches raised and placed it just beyond his grasp. When he bent down to get a drink, the water receded. Looming over his head was a giant stone like the one that Sisyphus was consigned to push up a mountain, only to watch it roll back down, striving to repeat the same meaningless task, forever.<sup>3</sup>

Mortimer has been retained by William Lovell's father to serve as William's governor, accompanying him on his Grand Tour of Europe. Young William Lovell is also connected to Mortimer's friend Charles Wilmont, because, in a fit of spontaneous passion and self-indulgence, he has convinced himself that he is in love with Wilmont's sister, Amalie.

Another complementary pair of correspondents, Willy the Butler and his brother Tom the Gardener, are naive realists. They view the world in a genuinely childlike manner, as opposed to the childishness of William Lovell and Edward Burton. Their subordinate social position, combined with a genuine affection for the masters they serve, has made them honest and appreciative. As they grow old and infirm, they focus on how they might support each other:

Speak no more to me of money. You are if nothing else my brother, we are old men; if I could secure your life with the whole of my miserable pittance, do not ask me whether I'd do it. Come to Bondly, or let yourself be brought here; for at your age feet are no longer made for walking. My money is yours; you have been ill for a long time and my master gives me more than I need. How can one brother be guilty in the eyes of another? In God's eyes we are all guilty and may he accordingly protect you. Willy your brother for ever. (Tieck, Pt. I 9)

With these sketches as a brief contrasting backdrop, the focus is on William Lovell's boredom. He is the typical Romantic anti-hero. A young man from the lesser English nobility, he has had all the benefits of a classical education provided in financially comfortable and aesthetically pleasing surroundings. He is an indulgent, narcissistic person whose passionate temperament is tolerated because he is handsome and charismatic.

His life consists of fantasies that serve to remove him from reality, social conventions, and the present moment. He is either projecting himself into the future or idealizing the past. As he says, without a trace of irony or regret, "I am simply wandering among dreams of the future and the past" (Tieck, Pt. VI 23).

He creates his own incessant boredom and world weariness by falling into a dream world where everything is better. Despite his enthusiasm and his perception of himself as a Romantic hero who drinks deeply from the wellsprings of worldly joys and sorrows, his existence actually consists of passive expectation. He waits for some new thing, a new person or place, to move him, in a Schopenhauerian sense. For example, in passive, ambiguous, language that denotes an experiential realm that is not under his control, he exclaims, "At many moments I seem to myself like a child that cries without even knowing why he is crying ... If this ardent little heart of mine little by little grows cold, this spark of divinity within me burns away to ashes and the world perchance terms me more reasonable, what will take the place of that tender love with which I should now wish to encompass the world?" (Tieck, Pt. I, 6).

A grandiose vision, couched in fatalistic language, "if ... perchance I seem ... without knowing why." What will happen to the little child! He is not in control and does not want to be, for that would be too rational, too conventional. He is free to the extent that he is a child of passion who contains a divine spark, but he is not autonomous. The price for his heteronomous abandon is that the meaning and significance of his life, as a totality, a project, is entirely outside of him, beyond his grasp. William apparently sees this as an immersion in the rich pageant of authentic human existence, but it is a rejection of the commitment

<sup>3</sup> Tantalus is also the Greek source of the English word *tantalise*.

that makes a life meaningful. He has become addicted to oscillating between exuberance and boredom as a way to avoid commitment.

William's father is busy orchestrating his son's future. He has invested his own resources, energies, and hopes in his son, and his happiness depends upon it. William rejects this future, ducking the obligation that comes along with being the recipient of his father's lavish outlay. William does not want to commit to his father's plan and make him happy, instead he wishes his father could become a version of himself:

But I fear my father regards my happiness from an entirely different point of view; he is older and that fair dawn of fancy has fled his quarter of the horizon, he measures the dimensions of the palace with the yardstick of reason; whereas the younger fanatic gazes at it in enraptured astonishment—ah, Edward, he perhaps estimates my happiness, while I would rather that he felt it; he perhaps seeks to prepare a bright future for me and imputes his sentiments to me; he is forming intimacies with others in order to make my reputation, in order to hoist me aloft in the great wide world, little realizing that I prefer the bucolic shadows of the forest and behold in this great wide world nothing but an infinite chaos of misery. (Tieck, Pt. I, 11)

William wishes his father could be identical with him, a mystical notion based upon an ecstatic union that fuses one to the other, bypassing rational reflection. Rather than attempting to make sense out of the world, William prefers the bucolic shadows, a blissful ignorance that will allow him to put off the existential commitment to forge a meaningful life in the infinite chaos of the great wide world.

William is bored on his Grand Tour, and why not, since nothing in the here and now can satisfy him. In Paris, the city of lights, the center of intellectual illumination, he broods in darkness and hides in the bucolic shadows of his self-induced boredom. And what does he do with his present-day experience? He rejects it in favor of a Golden Age reverie, in Heideggerian terms:

The architecture is bombastic and over-ornamented to the point of pedantry; one encounters no work of art that reflects a sublimity of spirit; the mirthful goddesses of whim and wit have debased all greatness into winsomeness; and accordingly the mighty, manly archetypes of Greece and Rome have been transformed into foppish and monstrous hermaphrodites ... How everything here disgusts me! One talks and chatters all day long without even once saying what one actually thinks ... Out of boredom I have gone to the theater a few times. Tragedies full of epigrams, without incident or emotion ... And then there are the cold, tedious, comedies! ... in the great, world-famous Paris Opera I have fallen asleep. (Tieck, Pt. I, 25)

It is hard to tell whether he is homesick, longing for some heavenly realm like the displaced angel in Magritte's *Le mal du Pays*, or if he is simply denying the beauty of eighteenth-century Paris by evaluating it in terms which he never experienced, the manly archetypes of Greece and Rome. Either way, the fantasy that there could have been a Golden Age in the past or that there will be one in the future is a sign of an ongoing personal crisis which William revels in and has become addicted to.

William's expression of disgust is also interesting in this context. Disgust is one of the primal human emotions and it serves to protect us from disease, infection, and contamination (Haidt 224-228).<sup>4</sup> Evolutionary psychologists argue that boredom is a derivative of the more basic emotion of disgust. It protects us from being drawn into situations or experiences that we deem unsafe or undesirable. For William, everything except for his imagination is undesirable, and his boredom protects him from opening into the world. He is addicted to boredom, and it allows him to remain a dilettante and dreamer, floating above the world. His life makes no sense because he has made it into a series of random events, and he rides his own peaks and valleys. This leads him to embrace chance and fate:

---

<sup>4</sup> Several other studies with similar findings are, Gerald L. Clore, Jonathan Haidt, Alexander Jordan, Simone Schnall, and Alison George. For ready reference, consult, [people.stern.nyu.edu/jhaidt/disgustscale.html](http://people.stern.nyu.edu/jhaidt/disgustscale.html)

There are times in life, Rosa, in which contingencies string themselves together so childishly that for a moment we are positively obliged to regard the world around us as a mental chimera. I plunge anew into this state of mind each time I think back on it all; oftentimes nothing in the world seems stranger to me than the notion that any event whatsoever should be connected to a preceding one, such that we are often actually compelled to accept the idea that human beings are accustomed to fate. (Tieck, Pt. V, 53, emphasis in original)

If the world is contingent and chaotic, then one either succumbs to fate or decides for oneself what things will mean and why they will have purpose. William decides not to decide: “I do not know why in the world I am still here. I ought at long last to return. My continuing absence from Rome is a manifestation of inconceivable indolence on my part. How can one be so entirely forsaken by all one’s strength, by all one’s inner forces?” (Tieck, Pt. VI, 14).

His question is merely rhetorical, and serves as a justification for his romantic refusal to act, his desire to once again be swept away and enchanted by the world itself. Toward the end of the novel, he feels his age and realizes death is not far. He begins to reflect on time, but he has no perspective, and gets nowhere, swooning in abstraction, in a rather Heideggerian sense:

The concept of time terrifies me. If I have a day ahead of me and do not know what I am supposed to start doing in it, to say nothing—oh!—of the sight of a tedious wasteland of inertia stretching ahead for week after week! And on top of that to go begging Time for one hour after another, cowering before the thought of death!” (Tieck, Pt. VI, 14).

As he ages and his passions subside, his feelings of reverence and awe are replaced by sublime terror which eventually devolves into a terrifying fear. His youthful desire to merge with almighty nature and absorb its power has developed into fear of disintegration:

I do not know why everything terrifies me; why the heavens with their stars are hovering over me so lugubriously. In solitude there dwells a kind of disquietude that constricts our entire soul; we are terrified in the presence of nature in her colossal monstrosity when no sunshine illuminates the mighty scene and directs our attention to isolated sections of it; darkness in contrast unites everything into a single, unsurveyable chaos. Then we sink without a trace into the savage and colossal ocean, wherein waves write against waves and everything flows amorously and haphazardly into everything else. Nowhere can anyone maintain a hold on anything; our world consequently bears the aspect of a formerly coherent terrestrial realm that has lately fallen into the maw of disintegration, and we are being gobbled up in there along with it. (Tieck, Pt. VI, 29)

Notice how he speaks for all of humanity. For William Lovell, unsurveyable chaos is simply the human condition. This may be true, but he has no way to respond to it except to essentialize his existence and neutralize his freedom. It is too late to find his way, having abandoned himself long ago to the winds of fate.

### **Conclusion: Addiction to Boredom—Only an Apparent Paradox**

I have argued that we can become addicted to boredom. William Lovell’s life is a literary example of a fairly common problem in the modern world. First, it should be reiterated that boredom may have a positive function. In its relationship to stronger emotions like disgust and contempt, boredom can protect us from getting too involved with or enthused about situations or people that can harm us. However, boredom can also come over us and hold us hostage. When boredom becomes an all-too-frequent

distraction from suffering, when it becomes an ideology, or when it becomes a way to escape from the present, it does more harm than good. The deepest problem is that remaining in shallow boredom can shelter us from an existentially important confrontation with the truly boring truth, that life has no meaning except what we make of it.

## Works Cited

- Bargdill, R.W. "A Phenomenological Investigation of Being Bored with Life." *Psychological Reports*, vol. 86, 2000, pp. 493-98.
- Campbell, Colin. *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*. Basil Blackwell, 1987.
- Clore, Gerald L., et al. "Disgust as Embodied Moral Judgment." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 34, no. 8, 2008, pp. 1906-1109.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Harper and Row, 1990. p 3.
- . *The Pursuit of Happiness*.  
[www.pursuit-of-happiness.org/history-of-happiness/mihaly-csikszentmihalyi/](http://www.pursuit-of-happiness.org/history-of-happiness/mihaly-csikszentmihalyi/).  
 Accessed July 1, 2018.
- Farmer, R. and N. D. Sundberg. "Boredom Proneness—the Development and Correlates of a New Scale." *Journal of Personality Assessment*, vol. 50, no. 2, 1986, pp. 4-17.
- George, Alison. "The Yuck Factor: The Surprising Power of Disgust: From Politics to Commerce to Sex, the 'Forgotten Emotion' of Disgust Can Affect You in Subtle Ways." *The New Scientist*, Issue 2873, Jul 14, 2012, pp. 1-4.
- Haidt, Jonathan. *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*. Basic Books, 2006.
- Haidt, Jonathan, et al. *The Disgust Scale Home Page*. Oct. 2012,  
[people.stern.nyu.edu/jhaidt/disgustscale.html](http://people.stern.nyu.edu/jhaidt/disgustscale.html).  
 Accessed July 1, 2018.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Harper and Row, 1962.
- . *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. Translated by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker, Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Lack, Tony. "Aesthetic Experience as Temporary Relief from Suffering: Schopenhauer, Buddhism, and Mu Qi's Six Persimmons." *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2014, pp. 2-15.
- Martin, Marion. "Are You Bored? The Phenomenon of Boredom in Relation to Occupations." *Stockholm World Federation of Occupational Therapists Annual Conference Proceedings*, vol. 1, 2002, pp. 121-146.
- Pickhardt, Carl. "Bored to Death: Risks from Boredom in Adolescence." *Psychology Today*, 21 Oct. 2012,  
[www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/surviving-your-childs-adolescence/201310/bored-death-risks-boredom-in-adolescence](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/surviving-your-childs-adolescence/201310/bored-death-risks-boredom-in-adolescence).  
 Accessed June 15, 2018.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The Wisdom of Life*. Translated by T. Bailey Saunders, Dover Publications, 2004.
- . *The World as Will and Representation*. Translated by E.F.J. Payne, Dover Publications, Reprint, 1966.
- Seligman, Martin. *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*. Free Press, 2011.
- Tieck, Ludwig. *William Lovell*. Translated by Douglas Robertson, 2009,  
[sites.google.com/site/theworldviewannex/system/app/pages/search?scope=search-site&q=William+Lovell](http://sites.google.com/site/theworldviewannex/system/app/pages/search?scope=search-site&q=William+Lovell).  
 Accessed May 15, 2018.



**Author:**

Anthony LACK is Assistant Professor of Humanities, Alamo College, San Antonio, TX. His research interests are the Philosophy of History and the Phenomenology of Time. Among his most recent publications, the following book reviews: *“Collective Memory and the Historical Past*, by Jeffrey Barash” published by Chicago: U of Chicago P. 2016, book review published in *Choice Reviews*; *“The Oxford Handbook of Buddhism*, ed. Michael Jerryson” published by OUP. 2017, book review published in *Choice Reviews*; *“Metaphilosophy*, by Henri Lefebvre” published by Verso. 2016, book review published in *Marx and Philosophy Review of Books*, August 2017.

**Contact:** [lackanthony4@gmail.com](mailto:lackanthony4@gmail.com)

© 2018 by the author. Licensee *HyperCultura*, “Hyperion” University, Bucharest, Romania. This is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Adriana Ghițoi

Hyperion University, Bucharest

## Addiction to/in Ion Luca Caragiale: Buddies, Chit-chat, Beer Houses, Coffee Houses

**Abstract:** The following text proposes to demonstrate two things. First, the relationship of Romanian writer Ion Luca Caragiale with the critics over the decades is one of apparent addiction. These critics espouse everything from sublime adulation to unfair disparagement. Secondly, the article explores particular types of characters, the ‘buddies,’ whose identity parameters are close mutual dependence, addiction to conversation and to the place where this happens, the beer or the coffee house. Both hypotheses refute the grim predictions regarding a potential lack of endurance and the charge of having penned works of destructive satire, attacking the Romanian people and their country. Therefore, the first half of my paper will offer a review of literary critiques, while the second half will analyze, through the comparative method, “Amicii,” “Lache și Mache,” “Amicul X,” “Situățiune,” and “O lacuna,” five works of fiction that offer a typology of ‘buddies.’ This will hopefully prove that Caragiale was not ‘anti-Romanian,’ a ‘rascal’ or ‘laughing with cruelty,’ but, on the contrary, was a ‘wise, good and ironic’ observer of human nature.

**Keywords:** Caragiale, irony, buddies, conversation, coffee house, beer house

### Introduction: Ion Luca Caragiale<sup>5</sup> and his critics

When one encounters Caragiale’s work, one experiences a multitude of feelings from the ‘pleasure of the text’ to the great responsibility of interpreting him, a responsibility which leads one to wonder what relation Caragiale had to his writing. He expressed this categorically more than once:

Spin, therefore, your pen ten times in the ink until you write a word and, after you have written it, think one hundred times if you do not need to delete it, not for the love of style, but for fear of danger.

Whenever something that has burdened your soul, either by causing it too much joy, or too much pain, sparkles in your mind—quickly delete that spark which may kindle a fire in your head.

Kindly delete the lines you feel would appeal to a lot of people, offending those powerful few—and replace them with the most rapid commonplace, and be careful even then not to wander off the amicable sound of sacred banality.

Good advice...

But this is very easy for some, and very hard for others.

No matter how reasonable you may want to be, you may still go wrong. (III:837) (my translation)<sup>6</sup>

If Caragiale himself experienced such anxieties during the laborious process of writing, imagine someone else looking into his texts, faced with the legacy of a huge body of exegesis. Comprising the bibliography of I. L. Caragiale, are two volumes containing more than one hundred pages and these were published twenty years ago—coordinated by Marin Bucur. Any attempt towards an exhaustive study, becomes, therefore, metaphorically speaking, suicidal, this leading us towards making the appropriate selections.

<sup>5</sup> 1852-1912, Romanian playwright, short story writer, poet, theater manager, political commentator and journalist from South Romania (Wallachia)

<sup>6</sup> This article treats a Romanian author and a Romanian context, not translated before. Therefore, all quotations from Caragiale and from its critics, as well as the names of Romanian journals, plays, etc. are our translations from Romanian. (editor’s note)

One can then demonstrate, as this article hopes to do, through the idea of 'dependence' or 'addiction', that despite the multitude of past approaches, Caragiale can still be analyzed in new ways. His work behaving almost like a living being, can adjust to various interpretations, providing the critics with resources that could justify a positive answer to a potentially leading question, namely, 'Caragiale? Again?'

Research on Caragiale covers a vast territory from the nineteenth century up until today no one can ignore. Names such as Titu Maiorescu or Constantin Dobrogeanu Gherea, Paul Zarifopol, Garabet Ibrăileanu, Eugen Lovinescu, Tudor Vianu, George Călinescu or Șerban Cioculescu.<sup>7</sup> Of the younger generation, we have Alexandru Dragomir, Silvian Iosifescu, Alexandru George, Ștefan Cazimir, Eugen Simion, Mircea Tomuș, Nicolae Manolescu, Mircea Iorgulescu, Florin Manolescu, Alexandru Călinescu, to Gelu Negrea, Dan C. Mihăilescu, Ioana Pârvulescu and Angelo Mitchievici.<sup>8</sup> This is to mention only the most important names in a much longer list of critics who could not help but somehow approach Caragiale.

It is no news that his work and its aesthetic value were and are judged in very contradictory terms. Caragiale benefited from laudatory reviews and endured severe critiques, maybe more than any other Romanian writer. From soft criticism to genuine disparagement, critics whose names were soon forgotten or famous, reproached him for the precariousness of his work and predicted its near death. Time has proved the opposite and yet, it has not spared the author from the doubt that made many critics wonder to what extent Caragiale was and is a great writer whose literature is able not only to pass the national or regional-Balkan test, but also to earn a universal passport.

\*\*\*

I will start my review with Angelo Mitchievici who is, perhaps, the most relevant example of a contemporary rereading. In his *Caragiale după Caragiale. Arcanele interpretării: exagerări, deformări, excese* (2014) (*Caragiale after Caragiale. The Secrets of Interpretation: Exaggerations, Distortions,*

<sup>7</sup> **Titu Maiorescu**: 1840-1917, literary critic and politician, founder of the *Junimea* Society (put the basis of the Romanian modern culture through scientific papers and essays, criticizing the idea of importing foreign institutions without the proper Romanian foundation); **Constantin Dobrogeanu Gherea**: 1855-1920, Marxist theorist, politician, sociologist, literary critic and journalist; **Paul Zarifopol**: 1874-1934, literary and social critic, essayist and literary historian; **Garabet Ibrăileanu**: 1871-1936, literary critic and theorist, writer, translator, sociologist and university professor; **Eugen Lovinescu**: 1874-1943, modernist literary historian, literary critic, novelist and member of the Romanian Academy; **Tudor Vianu**: 1898-1964, literary critic, poet, philosopher, member of the Romanian Academy and translator; **George Călinescu**: 1889-1965, literary critic, historian, novelist, journalist and writer, member of the Romanian Academy, famous for his *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* [*The History of Romanian Literature from its Origins until Today*]; **Șerban Cioculescu**: 1902-1988, literary critic, literary historian, journalist, university professor.

<sup>8</sup> **Alexandru Dragomir**: 1916-2002, philosopher; **Silvian Iosifescu**: 1917-2006, literary critic, educator, translator, university professor; **Alexandru George**: 1930-2012, literary critic, literary historian, translator, writer; **Ștefan Cazimir**: 1932-, literary critic, literary historian, university professor; **Eugen Simion**: 1933-, literary critic, literary historian, editor, university professor, former President of the Romanian Academy; **Mircea Tomuș**: 1934-, literary critic and historian; **Nicolae Manolescu**: 1939-, literary critic, member of the Romanian Academy, university professor, author of more than forty volumes on Romanian literature, the most important among them *O istorie critică a literaturii române* [*A Critical History of Romanian Literature*]; **Mircea Iorgulescu**: 1943-2011, literary critic and essayist, permanent collaborator of the Paris Office, editor, adjunct of *Europa Liberă*, the Romanian branch; **Florin Manolescu**: 1943-2015, literary critic, literary historian, writer; **Alexandru Călinescu**: 1945-, literary critic; **Gelu Negrea**: 1945-, literary critic, literary historian, writer, theater director, journalist; **Dan C. Mihăilescu**: 1953-, literary critic and historian; **Ioana Pârvulescu**: 1960-, university professor, writer; **Angelo Mitchievici**: 1972-, literary critic, writer, essayist, university professor.

Excesses), he identifies four types of 'looking' at Caragiale's universe, highlighting the distortions specific to each:

First of all, we have a Caragiale used as "anti-totalitarian instrument" not only by literary critics such as Mircea Iorgulescu (1994), but also by people from the theater and film industries who used the Greek or Latin tragedians or Shakespeare in the same way, as generous sources enabling them to sanction the Communist ideology. Mitchievici evokes here the theater director Liviu Ciulei and the movie director Lucian Pintilie. The latter, in his dystopia *De ce trag clopotele, Mitică?* (*Why Are the Bells Ringing, Mitică?*) makes a cinematographic synthesis of Caragiale's work placed under the sign of an ugliness not characteristic [of it] at all. To these forcefully-actualizing reading perspectives, as a panacea of communist history, Mitchievici opposes Nicolae Manolescu (2008) who considers the efforts to update Caragiale at any cost as going too far from the work itself, a protean [body of] work, one might add, in no need of such changes. (11-12)

Then, there is a Caragiale turned into an "ideologic and dialectic instrument, propagandistic material," presented as such during the 1950s when literary critique and theory produced deep genetic alterations in his work, reading it through lenses totally unrelated to the literary texts under analysis. Poor arguments have, however, made the names of such critics and literary historians, pass into oblivion. (12)

Thirdly, there is a Caragiale perceived as a "Romanian Molière," stripped of Caragialism which is, of course, an exaggeration on the part of Radu Stanca and Ion Negoitescu, and so is the Christian-Orthodox reading of Nicolae Steinhardt (12-13).

Finally, there is also the Caragiale of those who "want to cure us of Caragiale, or, rather, of *Caragialism in excess*, by naturally submitting its work to aesthetic analysis and by putting it back into the context of its own literature and culture" (13-14) (original emphasis). Famous names belong to this last trend, among these are Monica Lovinescu, Nicolae Manolescu, Gelu Negrea, Alexandru Dragomir and Dan C. Mihăilescu, while Mitchievici himself argues in favor of the return to the work itself and of taking it over with all the openness only a genius like Caragiale may offer.

If we consider these possible approaches, we can see a Caragiale 'contemporary by default,' which makes Mitchievici wonder about the definitions of the word 'contemporary.' In his attempt to explain it, the author starts from the *DEX [Romanian Explanatory Dictionary]* that sends the reader to the idea of actuality and modernity: "The contemporary' is an actual and a modern and is thus opposed to the outdated, the obsolete, to that which has gone out of use; it is anachronic. The contemporary is 'a human being of his/her own time, a modern person who lives the tension of the novelty in its entirety'" (22).

If we accept this definition, it seems obvious that calling Caragiale 'our contemporary,' as Jan Kott called Shakespeare, does not relate to time, but to identity, to what Mitchievici sees as "the contemporaneity effect" (22). This, in turn, seems to have been caused by some unnatural data transfer from the literary work to reality, leading to the argument in favor of not mixing the criteria of analysis, since literature needs to be judged from an aesthetic point of view, while the real world must be the object of sociologists and historians, who rely on the detailed research of facts, events and documents.

Therefore, such a statement as 'the Romanian identity is a Caragian one' is a total socio-historical fake. We can, however, speak of an identity of the characters of Caragiale's world. We will approach this type in the second part of this text, even while accepting the immensity of such a subject that, in spite of any meticulous research, pushes one towards omissions that weaken the border between scientific work and essay-writing.

And, although the work cannot be identified with the reality in which it was created, one still needs to consider the time of its production. There is, I argue, a difference between its capability of endurance, which is what gives it value, and monstrous-forced updates. Caragiale remains in the history of literature as belonging to classicism, excelling in the satirical genre; any reproach that ignores this reality is null and void. And yet it happened quite often. Especially in his own times, Caragiale was not received with open

arms by a developing society, the petty Romanian young bourgeoisie at the end of the nineteenth century perceiving him as an enemy:

The comedies introduced, in time, into the National Theater repertory were never on continuously. The most popular among them, *Scrisoarea Pierdută* had one hundred performances in thirty-two years (1884-1916). *D-ale carnavalului* was hissed at the opening night. *O noapte furtunoasă* was taken out of the repetoire after a few performances. *Schițele* and *Momentele* did not sell well immediately. (Cioculescu 411)

Cioculescu, who considers Caragiale one of the “living classics of our literature” (392), which time has confirmed, identifies four reasons for some anti-Caragiale voices in the field of literary critique and history, in his own time. In the chapter “Detractorii lui Caragiale” (“Caragiale’s Disparagers”) (391-424) he notes Caragiale’s rejection by the Romanian Academy, the adversity of the Liberal ideology, through *Junimea*,<sup>9</sup> a school reluctant to promote Caragiale’s work due its alleged satiric “amorality,” and last but not least, the hostile reception on the part of the immature petty bourgeois public, incapable of self-irony and self-critique.

The leading speaker of the Romanian Academy in terms of rejection was, surprisingly enough, a highly cultivated man: Bogdan Petriceicu-Hașdeu.<sup>10</sup> He was the one who expressed the Romanian Academy’s decision to deny Caragiale an award, in 1891, for a volume comprising his comedies. The latter was accused of anti-nationalism, manifested through writing only about the Romanian society’s lack of morality. But is satire meant to be a school of good manners praising the good and the beautiful? Does it not actually cultivate them by “exposing” their violation? Hașdeu was supported by Gheorghe Sion and Dimitrie A. Sturdza,<sup>11</sup> and Caragiale was defended by Iacob Negruzzi, the director of *Convorbiri literare* (*Literary Talks*), delegate of *Junimea* and Titu Maiorescu’s representative. In fact, the Liberal regime used Caragiale in this context to attack the Conservative *Junimea* indirectly, to whom the author belonged from a literary point of view, libeling being a favorite mechanism in the Conservative-Liberal war.

A deep hit came with the famous charge of plagiarism. In *Revista literară* (*The Literary Magazine*), year XXII, No. 16, from November, 30, 1901, an article appeared, called “Domnul Caragiale” (“Mister Caragiale”), signed Caion, Constantin Alexandru Ionescu’s pseudonym, where the author claimed that the drama *Năpasta* was just a copy of the Hungarian author Kemény Istvan’s play *Nenorocul* published in Brașov, translated by Alexandru Bogdan. Caion returned in the issue from December, 10, 1901 with another article, “Domnul Caragiale n-a plagiat, a copiat” (“Mister Caragiale Did Not Plagiarize, He Copied”), an article which made Caragiale sue Caion and the joint director of the magazine, Theodor M. Stoenescu, for libeling. With Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea as his lawyer, Caragiale won, but he was so disgusted with this episode that he would eventually leave for Berlin. Caion was exonerated, but he was suspended from *Revista literară* and went to *Forța morală* (*The Moral / Ethic Force*), under the leadership of Alexandru Macedonski who supported his position, driven by his deep anti-Junimist spirit and literary enmities between Caragiale and himself, due to ironic texts about Macedonski in *Moftul român* (*Romanian Whims*) in 1893. Macedonski seemed to lack the ‘courage of his own opinions’ and, Cioculescu proves, signed with the pseudonyms *Luciliu* and *Sallustiu*. Macedonski tried to save Caion announcing, quite unethically, in *Forța morală*, other alleged plagiarisms by Caragiale: *Scrisoarea pierdută* (*The Lost Letter*) after Victorien Sardou’s *Rabagas* and *D-ale carnavalului* (*Carnival Matters*) after *Le Carnaval d’un Merle Blanc* by Chivot

<sup>9</sup> Romanian society founded and ruled by Titu Maiorescu that put the basis of the Romanian modern culture through scientific papers and essays, criticizing the idea of importing foreign institutions without the proper Romanian foundation

<sup>10</sup> 1838-1907. Romanian writer and philologist

<sup>11</sup> Gheorghe Sion: 1822-1892, Romanian poet, playwright, translator and memoirist from Moldavia; Dimitrie A. Sturdza: 1833-1914, Romanian statesman and author, president of the Romanian Academy

and Duru. *Rabagas* will be staged at the National Theater, offering people the chance to evaluate both plays by themselves and see there was no plagiarism involved, thus shaming Macedonski in his anti-Caragiale campaign.

Another name which appeared on the disparagers' list is Pompiliu Eliade, professor of French at the Faculty of Letters in Bucharest, a future director of the National Theater, theater reviewer for *L'indépendance roumaine*, the French newspaper of the Liberal Party. Eliade predicted a quick and impending literary end for Caragiale: "I think his plays will not live for long and they will soon need as many comments as the Greek and Latin classics to be understood" (Eliade, qtd. in Cioculescu 401). Time has proven him wrong. We need only think that there is no theatrical season in 2018 without Caragiale. Theaters across the country stage his works which do not need any explanatory notes to make themselves understood. His work is present in all Romanian festivals, one of which bears his name. It is enough to remember that in the year 2012, "The Caragiale year" (one hundred years from his death) either traditional or nonconformist versions, of his work, were put on stage, works such as *Conu Leonida* (*Mr. Leonida*) directed by Silviu Purcărete, going so far as to transform *Scrisoaria pierdută* into an opera, with a libretto by Ștefan Neagrău and with music composed by Dan Dedi. Well-known publishing houses such as Cartea Românească, Casa Radio or Humanitas republish Caragiale continuously, not just for anniversaries.

Eugen Lovinescu made the same mistake, stating that "Fifty years from now there will be nothing left from the moral atmosphere of Caragiale's comedies ... One hundred years from now each line from *Scrisoarea pierdută* will need to be accompanied by a page of clarifications..." (Lovinescu qtd. in Cioculescu 404-405). Time has completely invalidated this hypothesis, proving the opposite. The work still catches the attention of generations after generations of creators.

The first negative review after his death came from Costantin Banu, former director of *Flacăra* (*The Flame*). It was delivered in 1927 during the Conference "Influența războiului asupra stării culturale de după război" ("The Influence of the War on the Post War Cultural State") at the Romanian Atheneum. It alluded to the "cruel laughter", the "unmerciful satire" and the "skepticism" caused by the War of Independence, a source of inspiration for Caragiale's "În vreme de război" ("In Times of War").

Nicolae Davidescu adds to the accusatory voices after Caragiale's death, continuing the Liberal critiques through an article in *Cuvântul liber* (*Free Speech*) from August 3, 1935, entitled "Caragiale cel din urmă ocupant fanariot, sau inaderența lui la spiritul românesc" ("Caragiale, the Last of the Phanariot Invaders, or His Non-Allegiance to the Romanian Spirit"). As the title suggests, it attacked Caragiale's "non-Romanian" origins and his system of values, accusing him of anti-Romanianness. The author's attitude during his exile in Berlin, for instance, proves the contrary, however. In his letters, he is not only interested in anything Romanian (see his involvement in the events related to the Peasant Rebellion from 1907 which results in the politically committed text "1907. Din primăvară până-n toamnă. Câteva note" ["1907. From Spring to Autumn. A Few Notes"]). He also misses and suffers longing for the country he had left, but which he continued to love. Requests such as, "write to me," "tell me," "answer me," "don't abandon me, I am waiting, have mercy with me," "write to me, don't forget me, please, write to me, I am lost ... If you don't write to me ... I will either shot myself, or I will remain the most miserable human being on earth," fill his correspondence. Besides his lack of national empathy, Caragiale is also accused of superficiality and spiritual weakness in treating his subjects. Davidescu thus falls in the trap of mixing criteria, demanding scientific, sociologic, historic or philosophic arguments from a satiric writer, looking towards the causes, instead of the effects, and claiming Caragiale's inconsistency. This alleged shallowness occurs in four areas, according to Davidescu: Caragiale's relationship with society, with the divinity, with nature and with women. Cioculescu parallels Caragiale with Molière, emphasizing that it did not occur to the French critics to exclude the great satirist or to condemn him for having been classic rather than romantic, or for not having made nature or religion his subject. The portrayal of women is perhaps the exception. Davidescu



also denounces his lack of morality and that his works are not educational exercises, an aspect, again, not innate to the satiric genre in which Caragiale excels.

Notwithstanding this harsh judgement, Caragiale belongs to our national fiber, he seems to be embedded in our genetic code, we are addicted to him as to a drug. As Ștefan Cazimir stated prophetically, "We will never be able to exhaust Caragiale. He will be the one to exhaust us" (2). This addiction appears either in political or in purely existential dilemmas, where any attempt at analyzing is comfortably and successfully replaced by such famous lines as, "Who am I going to vote for?"<sup>12</sup> which may describe either a voter's indecision or the impossibility of choosing in a complicated situation. It is used by those who know Caragiale and by those who do not. We may well add here "Pristanda's flags,"<sup>13</sup> which become a standard for any potential tax evasion or for any financial issue. Could this be the result of reading his works in the light of the literary realism of the nineteenth century or is it only his accurate and sharp observant turn of mind over the years, that human interest aspect that critics have denied him? In order to try and answer this question we need to hear Mitchievici's advice, and "let ourselves be possessed by Caragiale's genius," become ourselves Caragialian, that is, "wise, good and ironic" (4).

### Having a Chit-chat with Caragiale's "Buddies"

In what follows, I propose to argue for a humane, loving writer, not a destructive, vengeful one, whose satire stems from a deep understanding of people's shortcomings. I use the masculine protagonists from "Amicii," "Lache și Mache," "Amicul X," "Situățiune," and "O lacună" to illustrate this. What interests us here is the addiction of the characters of these works to conversation, in a beer or in a coffee house, about important subjects or small ones. Often this addiction is simply used as an emotional escape from tense situations which they cannot handle. Last but not least, I will discuss their addiction to each other. What can be more humane than that? One may approach this in various ways. We will confine ourselves to exploring their dependence.

\*\*\*

We know from Mircea Iorgulescu that "Chatting is the most widespread activity in Caragiale's world. Busy or not ... [his characters] cannot wait for an opportunity or a pretext to start a 'conversation,' usually a 'very lively' one and almost always a much prolonged one. Actually, this is their only job. Chatting is life itself" (11). Mitchievici talks about "the excess of words, verbal incontinence, verbosity in Caragiale. His characters are the talkative type, the chatterer, the one with verbal diarrhea, the incurable babbler; no matter to whom one is speaking, no matter the subject and no matter the interlocutor, talking becomes a necessity" (208). And, indeed, 'necessity' is what we are talking about. Has not chatting and talking with friends, over a coffee or a beer always been one of the small and great pleasures of life? In Caragiale's time "People gathered at the coffee house tables, with their unflinching constancy, local customers, to have a coffee and a beer, to indulge in petty politics and to examine the newspapers, word by word all the way through to the obituaries" (Petrescu 85). Does this sound like Caragiale? The newspaper is a character in his work, people read it in pubs, beer houses or restaurants; "press causes addiction just like any drug" (Pârvulescu, *Lumea* 28), and its content becomes the raw material for major literary themes in Caragiale (Pârvulescu, *Lumea* 45-46).

<sup>12</sup> Original version: "Eu pentru cine votez?"—Caragiale's character, *Cetățeanul turmentat*, The Drunk Citizen, from the play *Scrisoarea Pierdută* [*The Lost Letter*], has to go and vote during Election Day, in a play whose action revolves around two candidates from one party, and around blackmail with a love-letter, in some Romanian town. The character is a (former) postman, he is always drunk and keeps coming to the prefect's house and asking who he should vote for.

<sup>13</sup> The prefect's policeman in Caragiale's *Scrisoarea Pierdută*, who counts the same flags several times each

Today is not that different from yesterday: coffee and beer houses are full of people willing to meet and talk, politics or anything else, to negotiate contracts or to watch world football championships together. Although, if we were to believe philosopher Mihai Șora, who, we may argue, might be too skeptical, times have changed, something from that old leisure has been forgotten, the natural consequence of today's hectic life style. Time seems to fly, to pass differently than before and the world has discontinued the subtle and refined relationship of Bucharest's bohemian world at the Capșa coffee house, for instance, which wrapped those who entered it in the velvet-like ritual of chit-chat, and tempted those walking on Calea Victoriei:

I have not seen young people today drinking coffee at the corner, in a bar or in some garden. I see that an oriental tradition adjusted to the Romanian spirit has been lost. The coffee is not a slow, chit-chat drinking any more, but a quick one ... just a brown-blackish liquid which keeps one awake. We have lost a tradition whereby one did not only drink coffee, one also attended a ritual ... Coffee houses were spaces where people talked and manifested opposition with the political rulers. They are not anymore. I see Romanians have lost the capacity to contemplate ... There is way too much information around, too many 'smart' phones, tablets and laptops. I know, one needs to be integrated in the time when one lives, but if one stops responding to one's surroundings, one has ceased to exist. [...] I always remember Pope Clement the 7th's words: "Coffee is God's gift, the essence of intelligence. One cup of coffee saves you from hell." (28)

Caragiale himself was very fond of coffee, which may be responsible for his taste for this space where he seems to project himself into his characters: "Caragiale at the coffee house—notices Ibrăileanu—was an extremely clever man, a brutal clear-minded observer, an infallible 'metteur en scène' when needed to, he was able to speak for himself and to imitate. That is why Mister Iancu and I. L. Caragiale were one and the same being" (Cazimir 5).

Addiction to one's interlocutor and the coffee or the beer house as conversational environment makes Ioana Pârvulescu (2007) wonder to what extent his partners are real friends. Her conclusion is that we can talk about "a soft friendship very similar to mere acquaintance," (*În Țara* 10) which designates the status of a buddy rather than that of a friend. Her distinction between the two types of relationships is quite clear:

Friendship is a noble connection, of royal blood, with a strict behavioral code, that brings joy and comfort, but which demands commitment and sacrifice. Being a buddy implies a friendship without a tradition, with a borrowed code, where behavior rules are easy to adjust, the sacrifices are at a minimum, and solidarity and loyalty just an illusion. (*În Țara* 32-33)

To satisfy their need to talk, their addiction to logorrhea, people need buddies; the beer or the coffee house are conversational temples that perfectly suit them. Addiction and interdependence build the characters' identity.

Let us now see some of these buddies who inhabit Caragiale's works, keeping in mind that we are dealing with a satiric writer. I have chosen as a point of departure for my analysis the sketch called "Amicii" ("Buddies") (Caragiale, I:425-430), to see the parameters that define the communication situation in which such characters evolve. Lache and Mache, for example, function as a pair, 'two for the price of one—promotional offer!' As Ioana Pârvulescu (*În Țara* 16-22), Gelu Negrea (138; 185-187) and Angelo Mitchievici (157-164) noticed, Lache and Mache are a couple. With this couple the character traits and the behavioral patterns are either duplicated or totally opposed.

Let us step into these buddies' shoes and set out to see what the author has in store for them. At a first glance, Mache seems the passive one of the pair, waiting in the beer house, the best place to enhance his joy and his appetite for conversation. But only the providential presence of a buddy can satisfy him. One of his best buddies appears, none other than Lache. Unlike Mache's high spirits, Lache is "ill humored"

after a prolonged night with “some buddies,” at Cosman, where the main conversation subject had been precisely Mache. The way he introduces this subject makes Mache suspect he was not “spoken well of” and, driven by curiosity and convinced he is about to find out unpleasant things, he goes along with Lache. Lache, on the other hand, admonishes him, “Look! that is your fault—you are overreacting”; then he answers his questions with lines that only outline his portrait in a progressive-repetitive manner: “Look! that is your fault—you are curious,” “Look, see, that is your fault— you are interrupting!”, “Look, see, that is your fault—you are inquisitive,” “I am not going to tell you more because you are getting upset ... You must confess that is your fault—you are getting upset,” “Look, see? That is your fault—you are violent,” and the climax of it, the sum of all of his shortcomings, “Look, see, that is his fault—he is a scum! ... and violent! And he has no manners!” (425).

Then “two harsh blows with the palm of the hand” (425). How do we come to this violent turn? It happens when Take, another buddy, comes in, and exposes Lache: the latter had been lying about having attended the meeting where people had gossiped about Mache. Lache refuses to reveal to Mache the name of the gossiping “buddy,” professing moral considerations. It becomes obvious that Lache has only used the hypothetical friend to tell Mache some unpleasant truths which he cannot handle.

At a first glance, we might be tempted to agree with those denouncing Caragiale: what an immoral thing to do! Lache acts in ways that contradict friendship: he is lying, he is making up a plot to be able to tell his friend, piece by piece, what he has no courage to say directly as a true friend is supposed to do—that he is “a simpleton,” bad at playing cards, incompetent at his job, verging on an alcoholic, “married without a dowry” and cuckolded on top of it all (427). Mache does not seem to be unaware of the last, and, in fact, is tolerant of the relationship between his wife and his brother-in-law, a relationship which benefits him, financially. As to counter-balance Mache’s portrait, Lache has only good words about himself, suggesting to the readers the same alleged scoundrel-type of character: “but you all need to confess that I do have a quality—honesty,” “such good buddies are we,” “but you all need to confess that I do have a quality—I am close-mouthed” (427). Is Lache such a rascal, or may we re-read his character differently? The answer comes from Mache himself who never actually protests the insults, but, on the contrary, is curious, always asking for more details. Upset by what he hears, he warns Lache twice before the end that he is about to receive a ‘physical’ correction: “because I will slap you, do you copy?”, “I will slap you, do you copy!” (430). Neither does Lache respond violently, not only because there is no time, since Mache slaps him and quickly leaves, but also because perhaps he is not the intriguer we thought him to be. If we remember we are dealing with satiric writing, making fun of everything a friendship should not be, Caragiale might be making a plea for a loyal and true friendship. Our author does not use harsh irony or destructive sarcasm, but rather a certain geniality specific to him, in which laughter and satire are forms of spiritual broad-mindedness, self-irony belonging and being destined to superior beings, capable of watching themselves in the mirror. So, why should we reproach him?

Lache and Mache are the protagonists in another sketch as well, “Lache și Mache” (“Lache and Mache”) (Caragiale, I:747-750). Here they “make up a binomial with equal and identic terms, which, however, do not manifest themselves simultaneously, but alternatively, according to their momentary position inside the system” (Negrea 185). Actually, this is “a de-cliche-ization of the great friendship stories, a parody of the serious short story” (Pârvulescu, *În țara* 12). “Lache și Mache. Nuvelă” first appeared in *Calendarul Claponului* (*The Capon’s Calendar*) in 1878 reproducing the text from *Claponul* (1877) entitled “Smotocea și Cotocea” and it was reedited in the first series of *Moftul Român* from 1893 entitled “Lache și Mache” and then reprinted in the successive editions of *Opere*.

Lache and Mache are opposite faces of the same coin, which exemplifies ‘the power of friendship.’ They function as Siamese twins: although one was born in Dorohoi and the other in Severin, their destinies meet in Bucharest. “Whoever says Lache says Mache and vice versa” and “If you see one’s face at a crossroads, wait a little and you will see the face of the second, who, being a little late, hurries to reach his

other half; his half, indeed, because Lache and Mache are but one and the same with two faces, an only and unseparated being" (747).

Though their destinies are twinned, they are different in certain aspects, "Lache is smarter and more imaginative, Mache is deeper," (748) interchangeable and yet permanently completing each other, in various existential hypostases—at the coffee house, at the restaurant, on the street, at the theater, with full or empty pockets:

Therefore, when Mache happens to ask you for a cigar, you must give him two, or if not, he makes a venerable senator cigar, and after he takes a few cigarette papers from you, besides the cigar as such, he goes to share his prey with the other.

If any acquaintance wants to treat Lache with a coffee, he rejects the treat in favor of Mache, and thus the acquaintance is forced to treat them both. (748)

If their friendship seems to hide a certain degree of complicity which helps their relationship, they are known, nonetheless, as financially reliable in their favorite place of socialization, the coffee house: "Because they repay their debts honestly, when they are able to, Lache and Mache enjoy a certain credit at the coffee house where they drink regularly, [...]" (749).

Only one situation troubles their symbiotic relationship, and this is love. A correspondence misunderstanding leads to jealousy, which causes them to stay apart twenty-four long hours during which even nature is upset by their argument. Once reunited—since they cannot stay too much apart—nature becomes joyfully active again:

—Lache!

—Mache!

Then the sky brightened up completely, the thunders and the hailstorm went away [...] (750)

Both Ioana Pârvulescu (*În țara* 15) and Gelu Negrea (186) notice similarities between Lache and Mache and the heroes of Flaubert, Bouvard and Pécuchet, their Parisian 'cousins,' Lache and Mache's lines deserving a place in the *Dicționarul ideilor primite de-a gata* (*The Dictionary of Ready-made Ideas*).

Caragiale's irony manifests itself again as a way of winking complicitly to the readers as they witness all the human weaknesses of his heroes. They are two workmates, inseparable buddies, addicted to each other and to payday, they drink and eat on credit until payday; they take advantage of other 'buddies,' fall in love with the same woman, argue because of a misunderstanding related to that woman and happily reconcile when things are clarified. Nothing new, this is universal humanity in action!

A third type of buddy is represented by "Amicul X," (Caragiale, I:280-284) whom we are now going to call "Buddy X." This type is a braggart par excellence with Caragiale himself as his partner. The subject of this sketch is inspired by real history: the fall of the Conservative government led by Gheorghe Grigore Cantacuzino (the Nabob) who had become the party leader after the death of Lascăr Catargiu in 1899. On July 6, 1900, a cabinet is settled under the presidency of Cantacuzino as the result of the agreement with the political group Junimea led by Petre P. Carp. This is a great opportunity for Caragiale to introduce Buddy X, who, very well informed through his access to the circles of power, knows the exact make-up of the new cabinet and 'hobnobs' with the new appointed members.

Caragiale's irony manifests itself through his portrait of himself, rather than that of this buddy who makes the author feel like a nobody:

I am not a who, but a what; among humankind. I am but a number in the population statistics; and maybe ignored even there, because at the last census for the population of the capital, the agents with their registers went to almost everybody in our slums, but they didn't come to me. I am not ambitious; but this afflicts me ... To see yourself so small, to perceive yourself so insignificant! (281)

The contrast between the author and the Buddy X is obvious, and X can be anyone, and, unfortunately, seems to be ubiquitous, multiplied in various hypostases:

My buddy X is a preeminently nice guy, very well-known by all of us in Bucharest. How can we not know him? We meet him so often, everywhere: in the sumptuous elite lounges, at the modest slum parties, at Capșa, Gambrinus, Zdrafcu, Jockey, and at the Schreiber coffee house in Lipscani, in the Orient-Express, in the tramcar, in a coupé with rubber wheels, walking in overshoes—everywhere ready to greet you with all his civility and to shake your hand cordially, may you be a metropolitan or a candle lighter, a general or a goatherd, a minister or a street errand boy, a boyar, a cad, etc. (283)

Such flexibility makes “‘X’ become our most precious friend” (283). Caragiale proves himself again a great master in capturing universal humanity. Buddy X is that person you would want people to know he is your friend, who keeps on being a crook even when exposed, as it happens at the end of “Buddy X.” An inflation of words covers his existential void. He depends on the ear who listens to his bragging, without which he would lose his right to an identity.

The buddy may also be Nae from “Situatiune” (Caragiale, I: 371-376), at a “little beer house,” during a very delicate “situation”: the impossibility of being part of the moment when his wife gives birth to his son. For Caragiale, the necessary dialog partner, meeting a friend to have a drink at a beer house, a kind of a Sunday rest in a sultry day, turns into a nightmare: he is forced to bear what his buddy Nae cannot. Friendship, conversation and the beer house are good opportunities to postpone the tense emotional moment which he cannot handle. And since, as Romanians say, running away may be disgraceful, but it is certainly healthy, Mister Iancu saves himself by getting on a coach.

Finally, in “O lacună” (“A Gap”) (Caragiale, I:365-370) Lache Diaconescu and Mache Protopopescu, “very good friends,” “workmates,” and “brothers-in-law,” will both shirk their conjugal responsibilities—present for Lache, future for Mache—by escaping to a beer hall and by emerging themselves in a passionate discussion at Gambrinus. The beer house is the place where the inseparable couple get entangled in the conversational play of other “colleagues,” debating a very controversial issue: the death penalty, a “gap” in the criminal code. The beer flows as do the hours, while Lache’s wife and her sister, Miss Cecilia, future wife of Mache, wait for the two buddies at home for lunch. Mache has repeated and stressful outbursts of conscience, but Lache is much too caught up in the conversation to give it up. They leave the beer house, only to stop at another pub, then at the grocer’s for a plum brandy; they are finally saved from the meshes of the conversation by Mache’s conscience and the coach which arrives just in time. At home, where Lache’s vice, his lack of punctuality, is well known, they are forgiven, fed and treated with music and coffee, served in the lounge. Lache, however, can still not give up the debate and, in spite of Mache’s efforts to divert his attention, he remains anchored to the controversial issue. Mache, the fiancée conscious of his mission, elegant and obliging towards the fair sex, punctual, punctilious, has nothing in common with Lache, but cannot exist without this husband used to domestic duties and whose opinion on the gap in the criminal code and on its imposition is much more important than any code of manners. Caragiale’s irony is again kind here, since, should not one admire people’s strong belief in their principles under any circumstances? Actually, in spite of the appearances that seem to place the two of them on separate roads, Lache and Mache are one person with permutations, as Marina Cap-Bun also argues: “...Lache has once been a Mache, and Mache will soon become a Lache. Two hypostases of the same ego look face to face at each other, as in a fantastic paradigm” (199).

## Conclusions

Unfortunately, we will have to leave the other pairs of buddies for the future, buddies such as Niță and Ghiță, or those two in "C. F. R" ("Romanian Railroads"), engaged in heated conversations in beer and coffee houses. From one buddy to another, from one beer house to another and from one coffee house to the next, we have reached the end of a road, a road that demonstrates that Ion Luca Caragiale is our contemporary. This Romanian writer asks us to return to him so he can unveil yet new understandings; in doing so he offers us his aesthetic and cultural credo. This is a Caragiale who reveals himself to us, through his harmonious or antagonistically inseparable "buddies," as "wise, good and ironic" in the most constructive way. He is our contemporary through all he tells us about inter-human relationships and about society, thus making us addicted to him and to the universe of his works.

## Works Cited:

- Caragiale, I. L. *Opere, I-IV*. Univers Enciclopedic, 2000-2002. vols. I, III.  
 Cazimir, Ștefan, ed. *Amintiri despre Caragiale*. 2nd ed, Humanitas, 2013.  
 Cioculescu, Șerban. *Viața lui I.L.Caragiale.Caragialiana*. Editura Eminescu, 1977.  
 Iorgulescu, Mircea. *Marea trăncăneală. Eseu despre lumea lui Caragiale*. Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1994.  
 Manolescu, Nicolae. *Istoria critică a literaturii române. 5 secole de literatură*. Editura Paralela 45, 2008.  
 Mitchievici, Angelo. *Caragiale după Caragiale. Arcanele interpretării: exagerări, deformări, excесе*. Cartea Românească, 2014.  
 Negrea, Gelu. *Dicționar subiectiv al personajelor lui I. L. Caragiale (A-Z)*. Cartea Românească, 2009.  
 Pârvulescu, Ioana. *Lumea ca ziar. A patra putere: CARAGIALE*. Humanitas, 2011.  
 ---. *În Țara Miticilor: De șapte ori Caragiale*. Humanitas, 2007.  
 Petrescu, Cezar. *Cei trei regi*. Paul Editions, 2018.  
 Șora, Mihai. "La o cafea, cu Mihai Șora." *Formula As*, XXVIII, no. 1319, June 2018, p 28.

## Author

Adriana GHIȚOI is lecturer, Ph. D, at the Faculty of Journalism, "Hyperion" University, Bucharest, where she teaches Rhetorics, Semiotics and Argumentation in Advertising. She authored one book on I. L. Caragiale, *Caragiale Publicist* (Tritonic, 2005). Her current research focuses both on (teaching) media studies and on Caragiale, as her most recent papers show: "Public Interest and False News" (to be published, *Revista de studii media*, 7/2018); "Vechi și nou în retorica interacțiunii didactice" (*Revista de studii media*, 5-6/2016-2017), "La bulivar, birjar! La bulivar!..." (*Secolul 21*, 7-12/2016); "Dubito ergo sum sau despre etica îndoielii ca spectacol al neliniștii inteligenței" (*Revista de studii media*, 3/2014); "Caragiale and Gusti: Sociological Intersections" (*Analele Științifice ale Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași*, 2/2013, EBSCO, PROQUEST, CEEOL, SCIPRO etc. și CNSIS:B +). She is also interested in Romanian literature in general: "The Romanian Pastel: Meeting Border between Painting and Poetry" (during the Conference "Poetry and Other Arts," Padova, 2014).

**Contact:** [ady22ghittoi@yahoo.com](mailto:ady22ghittoi@yahoo.com)

© 2018 by the author. Licensee HyperCultura, "Hyperion" University, Bucharest, Romania. This is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Estella Ciobanu and Patricia Șoitu  
Ovidius University of Constanța

## Addiction A Moralization: Drugs, Alcohol, Sex and God-Power in Sarah Kane's *Cleansed*, Marc Schölermann's *Pathology* and Alex Garland's *Ex Machina*

**Abstract:** This paper examines a play (Sarah Kane's *Cleansed*) and two films (Marc Schölermann's *Pathology* and Alex Garland's *Ex Machina*) to assess the fallibility of their God-figures. The God-characters' downfall originates in behaviors that appear both moralized in Christian vein and pathologized in nineteenth-century psychiatric terms: addiction to power is aided by, or alternatively disguised as, substance addictions and/or inordinate sexuality. However different in medium and topic, the three (unrelated) dystopian works betray a concern with moral righteousness strictly circumscribed by the heteronormative and pleasure-prohibitive Judeo-Christian regime which undergirds the modern scientific outlook. Through their overt, consistent dramatization of religious-moral imperatives, all three works explore contemporary fears of and responses to sexual gratification and generally self-indulgence. Our close reading of intertextual echoes in the three works resorts to Michel Foucault's work on sexuality, alongside recent medical definitions of social pathology. We suggest that at a deeper level the works vent anxieties about the duplicity of the human psyche as the hinge between a normative society (figured as a punishing God) and deeply personal drives and pleasures (deemed sinful).

**Keywords:** addictions; Christian-cum-bourgeois moralization; punishment; God-figure; *Cleansed* (Sarah Kane); *Pathology* (Marc Schölermann); *Ex Machina* (Alex Garland)

### Introduction

*Ex Machina* (2014), Alex Garland's debut film, remediates<sup>14</sup> in the cinematic medium and in contemporary artificial intelligence (AI) key Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* conjoined with the Genesis story of Creation, Temptation, Fall and Expulsion. Nathan, the brilliant creator of AI androids, wishes his latest model's "human" consciousness tested.<sup>15</sup> The one invited to apply a modified Turing test, Caleb, a promising employee, prophesies enthusiastically that a successful result will write "the history of gods" (*Ex Machina* 00:11:13-15). Nevertheless, that history will never be written: the female android outsmarts (and overpowers) the two bright men. More tellingly still, she (*sic*) questions any human's self-appointed right to extinguish life—a mythical right, Yahweh's in the Bible, appropriated historically by tyrants as the power of life and death over their subjects. Despite this momentous feminist challenge,<sup>16</sup> Garland's film cannot escape the narrow moral circle it entered by choosing Genesis 1-3 as the canvas for its story. *Ex Machina* depicts Nathan as a fallible megalomaniac, a God with feet of clay, whose downfall owes not to

<sup>14</sup> Through *remediation*, "the representation of one medium in another" (Bolter and Grusin 45), each new medium challenges the *work* of its predecessors in terms of both representational accuracy (5-15, 65) and reformed political agenda (61-6), and thus becomes a *hybrid* that incorporates new devices alongside their emerging social and cultural functions (66).

<sup>15</sup> Space does not permit us to examine Garland's film's affinities with Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), e.g., their shared concern with testing the humanity of non-humans (and humans) by applying the Turing test (unnamed in Scott's film).

<sup>16</sup> See Henke (127) on the feminist controversy over Garland's film.

technological ineptitude, but to the Christian-cum-bourgeois moralization and punishment of self-gratification, pictured as alcohol-addiction and debauchery.

A similar feet-of-clay God features in Sarah Kane's play *Cleansed* (1998) in the person of Tinker and, if multiplied, in Marc Schölermann's *Pathology* (2008), a film that superimposes social pathology on pathology-related medical procedures. Tinker's failure to be a convincing omnipotent God-figure owes to his pathetic sexuality, in a play where sexuality (alongside drug-addiction) is the target for punitive correction. Schölermann's doctors' failure to be convincing science-driven God-figures owes equally to their murderous medical acts and personal weaknesses (alcohol- and drug-addiction and perverse sexuality), in a film whose victims die precisely for (viz., to "expiate") alleged addictions and sexual abuse.

This paper focuses on the conditions which produce the downfall of the figures of power in *Cleansed* and *Pathology* against the test case of *Ex Machina*. By overtly remediating the biblical Fall myth in the AI age, *Ex Machina* lays the groundwork for understanding the Christian moralization of addictions in the modern world as depicted in *Cleansed* and *Pathology*. Though completely unrelated, the three dystopian works ascribe the fallibility of their God-figures to self-gratification. Their morally unacceptable behavior, however, is further incriminated medically, i.e., pathologized in nineteenth-century psychiatric terms.

Foucault has unraveled, in his *History of Sexuality 1*, the discursive making and moralization of sex in both Christianity and medicine in connection with larger politico-economic interests (esp. 23-35, 121-59). On the one hand, amongst the sexual acts which the Hebrew Bible strictly prohibits (NRSV, Lev 18.1-30) and harshly *penalizes* (Lev 20.10-22) are incest (Lev 18.6-10) and same-sex relations (Lev 18.22); early Christian writers follow suit (Rom 1.27, same-sex relations). Meted with opprobrium—as an abomination (Lev. 20.13, homosexuality) blamable on “a reprobate mind” (Rom 1.28)—the two sexual crimes sentenced both parties to death. On the other hand, in modern secular societies heteronormativity as “the hegemonic discursive and nondiscursive normative idealization of heterosexuality” (Hird 27) has played a crucial role in establishing and maintaining sex complementarity, legitimated through the religious and scientific discourse of “nature” (23, 27, 144). Quite tellingly, the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *medicalization of perverse sexuality* (Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1* ch. 2) re-elaborated in explicit medical—i.e., pathological—terms what the Christian pastoral had deemed the vice against nature<sup>17</sup> (and doomed to hell). Nineteenth-century science was largely subordinated to morality, whose imperatives it transcoded to medical norm (Foucault 53; 117-19)—hence the psychiatrists' categories of “immoral behavior” or “aberrations of the genetic sense” (Foucault 64)—in a bid “to ensure the physical vigor and the moral cleanliness of the social body” (Foucault 54). Unfortunately, science's eugenic promise “to eliminate defective individuals, degenerate and bastardized populations” actually “justified the racisms of the state” (Foucault 54).<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the religious and medical interest in sexuality and sexual acts has conceivably rendered this private act most public—and perhaps most legislated about—of all.

### ***Ex Machina*: The God-Figure Incriminated**

In *Ex Machina*, Nathan Bateman (Oscar Isaac) has devised an AI android whose “human consciousness” he wishes tested by one of his programmers at Blue Books, Nathan's Internet search engine. Nathan has therefore invited to his estate Caleb Smith (Domhnall Gleeson) to apply a variation of the Turing test on the female-looking android Ava (Alicia Vikander) for one week; each of the six interview

<sup>17</sup> Although identified only obliquely as the “unnamed vice” or “sin against nature,” perverted sexuality included any form of sexual intercourse *not* performed within the wedlock, for procreation (rather than pleasure) and in the “missionary” position. All three conditions had to be met simultaneously for sexuality in general to be deemed acceptable rather than sinful.

<sup>18</sup> See also Foucault's *History of Madness* (Pt. I, ch. 3, esp. 87-91; Pt. III, ch. 4, esp. 494-7) on the “great confinement” and the correction of vice in the asylum, and *Essential Works 1* (141-62) on law, sex, sexuality and sexual choice.

sessions will be followed by a feedback session with Nathan. The Genesis-inspired symbolism of the six plus one days becomes gradually transparent. Like in Genesis, Nathan<sup>19</sup> is the creator of an artificial paradise<sup>20</sup> where he “plants” (ungrateful) creatures who refuse to obey him blindly: seduced by Ava,<sup>21</sup> Caleb promises to help her to escape. Eventually, Ava—aided by Kyoko (an earlier female android model)—fights with Nathan and deals him the *coup de grâce*. With Caleb locked in, she can flee (rather than being expelled) from “paradise” to roam the streets of New York. Thus, the God-punishment—death striking violently—on the God-figure (Nathan) comes literally *ex machina*, from an AI machine, if with no *Deus* affixed to it; nonetheless, this “machine” shares in her Maker’s power of life and death and thus becomes a *Dea* herself. Eutopia reveals itself as full-fledged dystopia, and Nathan’s AI project fails to inscribe “the history of gods.”<sup>22</sup> Is Nathan, therefore, an impotent god?

In this AI remediation of the Judeo-Christian myth of creation, Caleb is the serpent *invited* into the Garden of Eden *to try and test* Nathan’s creature (Gen 3.1-5). Unlike his biblical namesake (Num 13-14), Garland’s Caleb is not faithful to the film’s surrogate God. He “espies,” as requested, on the “enemy”—by testing the android—to assess the opportunity of seizing the (self-) promised land of AI, yet he develops an interest of his own in Ava and becomes a proto-Adam.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, though, Caleb can cheat Nathan out of the latter’s AI empire due to the maverick’s alcoholic inclination. A health-conscious modern man (*Ex Machina* 00:05:11-00:05:55, 00:24:22-00:25:43, 01:16:59-01:17:03), Nathan nevertheless drinks beer<sup>24</sup> galore (00:21:50-00:23:36, 00:58:46-01:00:08), but especially regularly (00:15:28-00:15:50). Exercising actually compensates—in biomedical terms of body toning, not in penitential terms—for drinking (00:06:16-00:06:27) and, we infer, for having sex (00:55:32-00:56:20). Alcohol boosts Nathan’s sexual appetite: Kyoko has to respond to his (thinly disguised sexual) urges after beer-drinking and dancing (00:57:29-00:59:24). Unsurprisingly, Caleb *induces* Nathan’s drunkenness (01:04:15-01:09:06) to pry into his computer, whence he learns the dark history of Nathan’s female android series (01:09:38-01:10:51). When, before the final feedback session, Caleb invites Nathan to join him for a drink, professedly to celebrate their experience, yet seemingly to start his secret escape plan, a now sober, contrite Nathan

<sup>19</sup> His biblical namesake is a prophet and a trusted adviser to King David, to whom he communicates God’s will (2 Sam 7.2-17, 2 Sam 12.1-15), i.e., the very opposite of Garland’s character.

<sup>20</sup> Nathan’s recluse mountain estate is a research facility which blends as much as it separates paradisiacal nature, as shown already in the film’s first shots (*Ex Machina* 00:01:40-00:03:34), and technological culture (00:03:40-00:04:34, 00:07:22-00:08:50, 00:11:19-00:13:00), which upgrades Victor Frankenstein’s laboratory.

<sup>21</sup> It is dually engineered: by Nathan through the heterosexual programming of an android with alluring female body parts—breasts, buttocks/abdomen and baby face—grafted on exposed circuitry, and by Ava through a masquerade of vulnerable femininity. Nathan, however, couches her flirtation implicitly in terms of Shakespeare’s Miranda–Ferdinand encounter (*Ex Machina* 00:50:20-00:50:30).

<sup>22</sup> “If you’ve created a conscious machine, that’s not the history of men, that’s the history of gods!” (*Ex Machina* 00:11:09-15). Or in Nathan’s warped quote, despite Caleb’s protestations: “if I’ve invented a machine with consciousness, I’m not a man, I’m a god ... I turned to Caleb and he looked up at me and he said, ‘You’re not a man, you’re a God’” (00:15:29-00:15:49). History is an exchange between men (in the narrow biological sense)—on behalf of all humankind—and megalomaniac individuals.

<sup>23</sup> Garland’s Caleb merges several biblical characters and Nathaniel, the protagonist of Hoffmann’s “The Sandman,” who falls in love with the automaton Olympia.

<sup>24</sup> Nathan offers wine for dinner during feedback session two, and drinking it seemingly boosts his aggressiveness towards Kyoko for having spilt wine on Caleb. Although Nathan drinks only two glasses, his hand’s leaning on the glass during the conversation can give the impression of addiction (*Ex Machina* 00:32:50-00:35:32).

refuses to drink. Whilst confessing “I’ve been overdoing it recently” (01:18:50-01:18:54), Nathan gloats silently that he has *pre-empted* Caleb’s plans. Hardly.<sup>25</sup>

Why should Ava wish to escape? Is her human/female consciousness so genuine as to prompt the android to refuse her confinement? Confessedly unaware of the Turing test in progress (*Ex Machina* 00:52:15-00:52:38), Ava nonetheless intuits—before Caleb learns from Nathan about (01:04:52–01:05:59)—her pending destruction and replacement with another android model, should she fail the Turing test (01:02:48-01:03:10). Indeed, Caleb discovers the early androids stored in Nathan’s bedroom—metaphorically the skeletons *in the closet* (01:11:02-01:11:42). Not only Nathan’s—or any other human being’s—power of life and death over androids does Ava contest (01:03:10-01:03:21), though. Yet another abuse—sexual—triggers her and Kyoko’s resentment and retaliation. With her AI “turned off,” Kyoko has become a maidservant (00:23:50-00:24:16, 00:32:00-00:32:47, 00:45:57-00:48:32) and sexual-service provider (00:52:28-00:52:34) to Nathan—or Caleb (00:57:55-00:58:06).<sup>26</sup> Nathan has equipped his exclusively female androids with genitalia for his, and by condescending permission, Caleb’s sexual gratification (00:46:00-00:48:30).<sup>27</sup> The film’s human–machine “heterosexual” intercourse challenges the hetero-normative regime; nevertheless, it also replicates the regime’s man-in-control-of-disempowered-woman logic.

A dystopian allegory which dramatizes, like Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, modern fears of the ills of godless manipulation of technology, *Ex Machina*, moreover, moralizes the ills of addictions—to alcohol, but also to power. Its God-figure, whose (biblical) name rhymes with Satan, the fallen Lucifer, prides hubristically in his technologically buttressed power, omniscience and superiority. Nathan’s pride—aided by alcoholism—causes his downfall; perverse heterosexuality his death. (Retaliation qua insubordination also causes Kyoko’s/the woman’s death.) Yet, pride, lust, and gluttony (which included alcohol intake) ranked amongst the seven capital sins in medieval hamartiology.<sup>28</sup> *Ex Machina* follows both the Christian logic of *retributive thinking*—which makes sin or crime punishable physically (Gorringe 7)—and, unawares, the modern reinterpretation of medieval views of vice as “differentiated articulations of ... discrete forms of an interrupted actualization of socially accepted forms of desire” (Newhauser 6).

Though biblically inflected, *Ex Machina*’s concern with punishing Nathan also owes to contemporary concerns, whether religious or medical, with power- and self-abuse. Whether plaguing individuals in tandem or separately, pride, lust and gluttony—remediated respectively as the will to (totalitarian) power, perverted sexuality (vis-à-vis the heteronormative regime) and drug- and/or alcohol-addiction—also undergird the downfall of most characters in Kane’s *Cleansed* and Schölermann’s *Pathology*.

### ***Cleansed*: The God-Figure Uncovered**

Sarah Kane’s play,<sup>29</sup> we submit, erects its edifice of sin and punishment through allusions to Hieronymus Bosch’s triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490-1500). *Cleansed* portrays sin as drug-consumption (Graham) and criminalized sexual drives or practices: same-sex (between Carl and Rod),

<sup>25</sup> During the power cut of session six Caleb instructs Ava how to co-operate in their escape after he gets Nathan “blind drunk” (*Ex Machina* 01:16:33-01:16:35), yet he has already reprogrammed the door lockdown, a pre-emptive move, for power cuts do not actually stop the recording.

<sup>26</sup> The same happens with the androids—male and female—slaving away for humankind in the TV series *Humans*: a code key activates female androids (hetero)sexually. Thus, *Ex Machina* and *Humans* remediate the story of Pygmalion and Galatea, the patriarchal Ur-text of (re)constructing women as men’s sex toys and maidservants.

<sup>27</sup> “Sexuality is fun” (*Ex Machina* 00:46:30-00:46:33), Nathan teaches Caleb, yet without mentioning whose. Nathan utters the line during the android genital anatomy lesson. Throughout the scene, Nathan drinks beer, or rather holds the bottle in his hand.

<sup>28</sup> See Cook on the Christian construal of alcohol-addiction as a vice.

<sup>29</sup> *Cleansed* premiered at the Royal Court Theatre, Downstairs, London in 1998.

incestuous (between the siblings Grace and Graham) or quasi-adulterous love (Robin's unconsummated flame for Grace) and masturbation (Tinker). Bosch's inner-face central panel features the earthly paradise of the senses, as artificial as Nathan's in *Ex Machina*, awash with sin, from sexual delights (excessive sexual gratification; homosexuality; miscegenation<sup>30</sup>) to gluttony. In Bosch, the right panel's "musical hell" depicts sin (viz., the sinners') punishment. Sin is sorely punished in Kane, too. The opening stage direction<sup>31</sup> of Scene 1—and thus the opening of the play—specifies the setting: "Just inside the perimeter fence of a university" (Kane 1). Considering the activities unfolding within this *circumscribed* space (like Bosch's Garden), the play's university "resembles more a psychiatric institution annex of a concentration camp" (de Vos 124) and modern purgatory (or perhaps hell) than a campus. Unsurprisingly, the events echo the etymological burden of *university*, from *universitas*: "the whole taken together, the entirety," hence also "the universe" as "the sum of all things" (*OLD*, s.v. "ūniuersitās," sense 1): a "homogenous whole" ("ūniuersus," sense 4).

Kane's university/universe abhors, exposes and ruthlessly punishes vice—any disruption of legislated homogeneity. In Scene 1, Graham requests an overdose of "smack" (Kane 1, s.d.), which Tinker—"a dealer not a doctor" (Kane 1)—injects into his eye; the horrendous procedure kills the "addict" (Kane 6) and closes both the scene and one infernal circle of depravity. Scene 2 opens another circle of vice. As "a cricket match [is] in progress on the other side of the fence," Carl and Rod speak of love "on the college green just inside the perimeter fence of the university" (Kane 3, o.s.d.).<sup>32</sup> Their homosexual relationship now concerns exclusively half-vows, including the pledge to lay down one's life for the other, and a failed ring exchange complementing Carl's unreciprocated verbal commitment to Rod.<sup>33</sup> Scene 2 closes with a doubly indented stage direction, "They kiss. Tinker is watching" (Kane 6), whose second line recurs, with one exception,<sup>34</sup> to signal moments of unpermitted conduct. "Tinker is watching": Nineteen-year-old Robin, whom Grace teaches writing, confesses his infatuation with her (Kane 20, Scene 7, s.d.);<sup>35</sup> Rod reassures Carl regarding the latter's lapse in love in Scene 4 (Kane 23, Scene 8, s.d.); Carl dances for Rod (Kane 30, Scene 13, s.d.); Carl and Rod make love, Rod says his vows before climaxing and they "go to sleep wrapped around each other" (Kane 35, Scene 16, s.d.). Tinker virtually embodies the disciplining surveillance *dispositif*<sup>36</sup> of the panopticon (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 195-228): he is the omnipresent *overseer* (translating the Greek *episcopos*, "bishop"), the all-seeing God—in *Ex Machina* self-enabled technologically, like Orwell's Big Brother—ready to punish criminality.

What Tinker represents in the play's moral economy transpires from Scene 4, set in "[t]he Red Room—the university sports hall" (Kane 10, o.s.d.1). "Carl is being heavily beaten by an unseen group of men" under whose sonorous blows his "body reacts as if he has received the blow" (Kane 10, o.s.d.2-4). The battery stops and resumes "methodically" (Kane 10, s.d.) until Carl falls unconscious. Tinker orders: "Don't kill him. / Save him" (Kane 10). *Nominally*, he equivocates between clemency and renewed efforts at redeeming Carl from sin by disciplining and normalizing the homosexual confined in the prison-house of

<sup>30</sup> Miscegenation is suggested by the Africans present and by chaotic human-animal congress, unlike on the left panel (the Garden of Eden), with its geometry of species "purity" and virtually no cross-species interaction.

<sup>31</sup> Henceforth respectively s.d., o.s.d. and c.s.d. (closing stage direction), followed by line number if appropriate.

<sup>32</sup> The setting highlights the inside/outside logic of this universe and likens the university's topography to Dante's inferno.

<sup>33</sup> Scene 4 exposes Carl's commitment as insubstantial.

<sup>34</sup> In Scene 17, "the chair is pulled from under Robin" (Kane 38, s.d.) and the boy dies hanged, punished for his romantic love.

<sup>35</sup> Yet the first one who watches Grace and Robin is her revenant sibling: "Graham is watching" (Kane 17, o.s.d.5). When the Voices beat Grace, the stage direction adds about Graham, "in distress" (Kane 24, Scene 10, o.s.d.6).

<sup>36</sup> Foucault's *dispositif* "designate[s] a configuration or arrangement of elements and forces, practices and discourses, power and knowledge, that is both strategic and technical" (*Psychiatric Power* xxiii).



heteronormativity. Saving requires a symbolic crucifixion for sexual infamy: impaling with a pole thrust up the victim's anus, which the sadistic Tinker envisages reaching up to Carl's right shoulder (Kane 10). Tinker's torture of Carl—Kane's polemical rewriting of the Crucifixion—remediates on stage Bosch's musical hell,<sup>37</sup> itself a remediation of the pastoral on afterlife fiery expiation of sins. Aimed to extract Carl's confession about stigmatized homosexuality (Kane 11),<sup>38</sup> the torture also indicates Tinker's vexing God position. During his punitive torture Carl cries out to "Christ," "Jesus" and "God" (Kane 11), begging for clemency. The script deliberately equivocates typographically to render Tinker the invocation's target, culminating with "Please don't fucking kill me God," bawled before Carl offers Rod to die in his stead (Kane 11). Rod falls nearby from a great height (Kane 11, s.d.), *deus ex machina*, to Carl's remorseful surprise. This is when Tinker cuts off Carl's tongue "with a large pair of scissors" (Kane 12, s.d.). What does Tinker punish: Carl's insubstantial vows early, his refusal to confess now, or his ecstatic delight during intercourse? <sup>39</sup> Dismayed to have watched their coupling, in Scene 16 Tinker extricates Rod from his crippled lover and requests the former to choose between his own life and Carl's (Kane 35). True to his recent promise (Kane 35), Rod insists: "Me. Not Carl. Me" (Kane 35). Tinker obligingly cuts Rod's throat (Kane 35, s.d.) and orders his body burnt (Kane 36), just as Graham's was (Kane 6), symbolic of the Christian fate of sinners—in *Pathology*, too. Tinker's fiendish character, modelled on Yahweh's, savagely suppresses criminalized sexuality.

The scene of Carl's battery also starts forging the play's grim relationship with two intertextually related scenes of gory silencing. Tongue-severing will prevent Lavinia (in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*)<sup>40</sup>—explicitly on the model of Philomela (in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*)<sup>41</sup>—from divulging her abusers. Having learnt their lesson from Ovid's text, Lavinia's rapists sever her hands too, to foreclose the possibility of alternative, *non-verbal* communication through weaving the rape story, Philomela-fashion.<sup>42</sup> As in Shakespeare, so in Kane. On noticing that tongue-less Carl writes in the mud, like Lavinia (and Ovid's Io), asking for Rod's forgiveness, Tinker chops off his hands (Kane 23, Scene 8, s.d.); on watching Carl's frenzied love dance, Tinker "cuts off his feet" (Kane 30, Scene 13, s.d.); on watching the consummation of homosexual love, Tinker permits Rod to choose to die in Carl's stead (Kane 35, Scene 16). Tinker learns progressively how to stop, but cannot prevent, *erotic* communication.

Likewise, Grace's love for her dead brother, Graham, now a revenant-like character, or rather her alter ego (Kane 20),<sup>43</sup> leads to erotically charged moments (Scene 5) and Grace's sore punishment. First, she is beaten by the invisible Voices (Scene 10) also responsible for Carl's battery in the same Red Room

<sup>37</sup> Torture inflicted with musical instruments includes thrusting a flute up a man's anus, off-center on Bosch's right panel.

<sup>38</sup> The scene demonstrates that confession is a frontier of Christianity's general truth regime (Foucault, *Government of the Living* 102-3), here concerning Christianity's own homophobia.

<sup>39</sup> Tinker mocks Carl: "Rodney Rodney split me in half" (Kane 11).

<sup>40</sup> Prompted by Aaron (*TA* 2.1.104-31), later explicitly along the Ovidian lines (2.3.37-45), Chiron and Demetrius rape Lavinia in the forest.

<sup>41</sup> Tereus rapes Philomela (*Met.* 6.523-4); since she threatens to expose his crime (6.544-8), he severs her tongue with the pincers (6.556-7), rapes her again and abandons her confined in the forest hut.

<sup>42</sup> Despite her disabling mutilation, Lavinia nevertheless "speaks": she reaches with her stumps for her nephew's copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, to indicate the Philomela story (*TA* 4.1.47-53); then, taught by her uncle, Marcus, how to write on the sand with his staff held in her mouth, Lavinia scratches: "Stuprum. Chiron. Demetrius" (4.1.78). *Stuprum* names both "dishonor, shame" and "illicit sexual intercourse in any form (whether forced or not)" (*OLD*, s.v. "stuprum").

<sup>43</sup> "Grace suffers from an extended imaginary identification with her brother," whom she "mirrors" corporeally and sartorially "in the hope to eventually unite with him" (de Vos 125).



(Scene 4), insulted, and eventually raped by a Voice (Kane 26, s.d.),<sup>44</sup> under Graham's compassionate gaze. Later, in the "White Room—the university sanatorium" (Kane 6, o.s.d.) where she first encountered Tinker and was (mis)treated as a patient, Grace complains, "My balls hurt" (Kane 28, Scene 12), which adumbrates her surgically induced metamorphosis into Graham in Scene 18. Yet the Voices tease, in Scene 12: "Frazzle it (out)" or "Burn it out" (Kane 29). Tinker applies electroshocks to Grace (Kane 29, c.s.d.2-4), until the "tiny shaft of light coming through a crack in the ceiling" (Kane 28, o.s.d.2-3) "grows bigger and bigger" and "engulfs them all" (Kane 29, c.s.d.5). The "blinding" (Kane 29, c.s.d.6) effect of the electroshock therapy which burns out Grace's brain (Kane 29, c.s.d.3-4) to "cure" her of her incestuous love remediates polemically the light representing, in the religious iconography of Luke's Annunciation episode, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Virgin Mary (Lk. 1.35). Yet Grace's love is pure and flowers,<sup>45</sup> for she commits herself to the one consubstantial with her (in a secular, non-dogmatic sense), her brother/alter ego, until complete identification/transubstantiation: Tinker has obligingly enabled Grace to become fe/male—Graham (Kane 38-9, Scene 18).<sup>46</sup> Her excruciatingly painful (Kane 39) castration—Grace's breasts are severed and her vulva is sewn up (Kane 38, o.p.s.2-4)<sup>47</sup>—entwines St. Agatha's martyrdom and the ancient siren's coerced Christian metamorphosis from hybrid/bird to hybrid/fish (to signify the incrimination of female sexuality).

Tinker embodies, therefore, the exterminating God of concentration camps, who judges and punishes sexual deviance, alongside drug-addiction. He exercises his sovereign power of life and death—through drugs/medication, electroshocks, battery, mutilation and killing—in order to "normalize" deviance and create a homogeneous universe/university, or at least to separate light from darkness, like Yahweh. Yet Kane's polemic against contemporary outbursts of intolerance runs deeper. Like *Ex Machina's* Nathan, Tinker is but a God with feet of clay, thus revealed—since Scene 5—in the peep-show episodes appositely set in "[t]he Black Room—the showers in the university sports hall converted into peep-show booths" (Kane 15, o.s.d.1-2). In this camera obscura of obscure(d) passions, Tinker masturbates whilst watching the Woman dancing (Kane 15, o.s.d.9-10; Kane 30, o.s.d.6). The mighty overseer of vice and its correction is not even sexually self-sufficient: the Woman becomes the supplement (in Derrida's sense) and later his "straight" sex toy, and self-appointed lover (Scene 19). Ironically, the bathetic revelation—redolent of the Wizard of Oz<sup>48</sup>—renders Tinker both "a common man"<sup>49</sup> and a common chauvinist, the unreliable savior of "lost" women<sup>50</sup> whom he nevertheless chastises and abuses sexually (Kane 31, Scene 14). In the peep-show booth, Tinker reflects the monstrous sexuality/sensuality which Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll expunges from himself, with the aid of the potion, as Mr. Hyde. Kane's sex-straightening god "attempts to make an absolute division between the respectable and the disreputable, the righteous and the libertine, the social

<sup>44</sup> The Voices that aid Tinker to straighten up the sexually deviant may substantiate theatrically the voice of the super-ego. However, they also recall the Wizard of Oz as himself "a Voice seeming to come from somewhere near the top of the great dome" (Baum 181-2)—a fundamental church structure—saying "solemnly: 'I am Oz, the Great and Terrible'" (Baum 182), in Yahweh's self-introduction formula: "God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome" (Deut 10.17). In either case the Voices act as terrorizing invisible gods.

<sup>45</sup> Hence the magic realism of the flowers bursting through the floor in affectionate scenes between Grace and Graham (Kane 14, s.d.; 27, s.d.).

<sup>46</sup> See also the speech-headings of the final scene: Grace/Graham (Kane 43-4, Scene 20).

<sup>47</sup> Carl, also castrated, lies unconscious next to Grace in the White Room (Kane 38, o.s.d.5-6).

<sup>48</sup> Uncovered as a mere technician of miracle-working (Baum 183-4), the wizard confesses he is a "humbug" (Baum 184).

<sup>49</sup> The "wizard's" apologetic self-description (Baum 184).

<sup>50</sup> "Grace" (the peep-show Woman) asks Tinker to "save" her (Kane 24). He tells a beaten and raped Grace: "I'm here to save you" (Kane 27)—the same as he "saved" Carl through battery (Kane 10). Originally, though, when Grace insisted to remain so as to find her brother, Tinker warned her: "I can't protect you" (8).

and the sensual/sexual. But he fails” (Mighall xxv). Ironically, Robert Mighall describes Dr. Jekyll, not Tinker—interchangeable though they are as power-wielders.

Tinker is the perverse moralist who corrects and disciplines everyone else whose sexuality/sensuality fails to comply with the imperatives of Christian/bourgeois heteronormativity in the claustrophobic university-cum-concentration camp for the sexually deviant and drug-addicts. His recourse to torture (and botched surgery) is redolent of texts and practices in European history that reek of homophobic intolerance. Although he oscillates between presenting himself as a doctor (Kane 16) and negating it (1; 39), he doctors society ruthlessly. What happens when physicians take a like interest in eradicating vice, as in Marc Schölermann’s film *Pathology*?

### ***Pathology*: The Psychopathic God-Figure**

Schölermann’s *Pathology* appears to exalt its namesake medical branch, and in particular autopsy, at a time when the latter may be heading towards extinction (van den Tweel and Wittekind 75). The film’s pathology residents perform forensic autopsy with (excessive) gusto. Notwithstanding, the medical setting frames ethical, not scientific, concerns. Unlike Tinker, Schölermann’s protagonists aim to exploit, not eradicate, vice, if, like Tinker, by being immersed in it.

A brief medical detour will illuminate the medical trappings of the film’s ethical conundrum. Autopsy can be either medical or forensic (aka medico-legal). The latter most often belongs with the proceedings for the investigation of *suspicious* death, whether accidental, caused by murder, through suicide, or through malpraxis (Eriksson 153). The historically older medical autopsy has changed its purpose from broadly establishing the cause of death to issues of quality assurance in the antemortem medical act (van den Tweel and Wittekind 75; Dehner 94). Now largely abandoned save in academic medical centers, yet in decline even there (Dehner 94), the medical autopsy serves the purposes of medical education such as by “delivering cases for problem-based learning for students” (van den Tweel and Wittekind 75).

Precisely problem-based learning through autopsy furnishes the setting of *Pathology*. An elderly professor, Dr. Quentin Morris (John de Lancia), extols autopsy as “a window to God” (*Pathology* 00:05:12), the *via regis* to God-like knowledge of life and death. Slightly before, on introducing the young intern Ted Grey (Milo Ventimiglia) to Pathology Room 1, fellow resident Ben Stravinsky (Keir O’Donnell) whispers to him: “some of these guys, last year, they decided that ... they’re gonna be God’s gift to this place” (00:04:46-00:04:52). The word God is uttered twice within thirty seconds, by two characters. What has God to do with pathology? Dr. Jake Gallo (Michael Weston), a pathology resident, elides autopsy with honing medical skills in an entertaining *game* (00:26:26-00:26:31) professedly devised for “the intellectual challenge” (00:27:25-00:27:26) to his coterie of fellow residents. Yet, whereas Dr. Gregory House (Hugh Laurie), the brilliant diagnostic expert of the *House M.D.* series (2004-2012), is callously driven by an abstract, detective interest—akin to Sherlock Holmes’s—in cases, not in the patients, the Gallo team members not only flout deontology and hospital regulations, like House, but, unlike him, *kill* people to furnish their own object of forensic examination (of the *modus operandi*).

The perverse pathologists choose their victims from amongst the destitute, who, neglected by society, cannot be missed; their absence cannot therefore incriminate the team. Such choice allegedly cleanses society of its undeserving members (*Pathology* 00:26:47-00:27:00), e.g., drunkards, prostitutes, and child or wife abusers. However, the victims of the forensic game soon gain social luster. In a vicious retaliation circle, first Jake’s girlfriend, Dr. Juliette Bath (Lauren Lee Smith), then Ted’s fiancée, law graduate Gwendolyn Williamson (Alyssa Milano), and finally Dr. Jake Gallo himself end up on the autopsy table. Jake kills Juliette to punish her infidelity with Ted, and Gwen to retaliate on Ted for the lethal trap set to the team. Aided by Stravinsky, Ted vivisects Jake to give him a taste of Gwen’s death, yet also as the finishing touch in outsmarting his rival (whom he has deceived with the doctored autopsy report on Gwen). From pathologists, Schölermann’s doctors turn out to be psychopaths who vie with each other for

committing the perfect murder on innocent victims, or even for removing their rival, in a God-game of knowledge, professional pride, power and judgement/punishment.

If *Pathology* centers on deciding (and engineering) the expiation of (alleged) guilt under a forensic guise, where death decontextualizes St. Paul's "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6.23), who is/are the God-figure(s)? Jake fully qualifies, adept as he is at the removal of "irredeemable filth" (*Pathology* 00:26:54) and at retaliation. Yet, when Ted blasts the Gallo team dead for their murderous game and later vivisects Jake, he too plays at God, or at least at the human judge, through *supererogation*, in the general sense of "do[ing] more than is required or necessary" (Oxford Dictionary online, s.v. "supererogation").<sup>51</sup> Having bitten from the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2.17, 3.5-3.6) through bloodshed,<sup>52</sup> Ted, a modern—and pathologized—Adam now contritely tries to stop the propagation of evil-doing.

The film opens a meta-discursive window to the complex meaning of pathology itself. "Pathology" names "*the science of the causes and effects of diseases, especially the branch of medicine that deals with the laboratory examination of samples of body tissue for diagnostic or forensic purposes*"; it denotes "pathological features considered collectively" (i.e., "the typical behavior of a disease") and a "pathological condition," but also connotes any "*mental, social, or linguistic abnormality or malfunction*" (Oxford Dictionary online, s.v. "pathology"). Not so much the medical as the social dimension of pathology concerns Schölermann's film: psychopathy. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) classifies psychopathy as an *antisocial personality disorder* which belongs with disruptive, impulse-control, and conduct disorders. The antisocial personality disorder (DSM-5, 659-63) evinces a "pervasive pattern of disregard for, and violation of, the rights of others," with deceit and manipulation as its central features (659). Its distinguishing characteristics, however, are callousness and lack of empathy, "inflated and arrogant self-appraisal" and "a glib, superficial charm" (DSM-5 660). Individuals suffering from it may have associated disorders, including substance use disorder and "other disorders of impulse control," whilst their personality features "meet criteria for other personality disorders, particularly borderline, histrionic, and narcissistic personality disorders" (DSM-5 661).

Whether one interprets Schölermann's *Pathology* as an unpalatable (medical) film noir, a gory filmic exercise in sado-masochism or a covert moralist film disguised as a thriller, it epitomizes much of the above medical description. Through their homicidal abuse of science, the residents *arrogate to themselves the divine power to judge and punish*, i.e., the power of life and death exercised to cleanse the world, in a forensic game-cum-contest of wits which deviously celebrates medical knowledge qua ingenuity to kill and/or identify the *modus operandi*. Nonetheless, the film consistently, if implicitly, *moralizes* its protagonists' pathology: Dr. Griffin Cavanaugh (Johnny Whitworth) is the archetypal methamphetamine smoker; Juliette also smokes meth; even Ted shares Griffin's pipe in the old morgue when he has brought his victim's cadaver.<sup>53</sup> The homicidal doctors fully perform their social deviancy, for alcohol- and drug-addiction also associates with sexual overstimulation, hence their disinhibited performance of wild sex<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> In strict Roman Catholic doctrinal terms, *supererogation* means "do[ing] more than what God requires or commands, thereby earning merit *for others*" (Oxford Dictionary online).

<sup>52</sup> Ted aids Juliette to commit the perfect murder before taking his own turn in the game. Revulsion at the team's deeds only grips him after he watches Jake's homicidal frenzy vis-à-vis the three prostitutes.

<sup>53</sup> On drug-addiction from a therapeutic perspective, see Blume (chs. 1-3). Epidemiological research which concerns the period covered by *Pathology* (2008) suggests that "probably 10 to 20% of the population of the United States may have problems related to substance use" (Blume 2); although alcohol, tobacco and marijuana are "the most widely abused substances ..., the typical pattern is for a person to abuse more than one substance at a time" (Blume 2).

<sup>54</sup> Sexual intercourse in the mortuary occurs, for instance, after the forensic autopsy of the cadaver brought by Juliette (*Pathology* 00:42:41-00:43:47). The fast cuts (00:49:12-00:49:40) from bar dancing, as well as drug consumption and homoeroticism, to autopsying and erotic sado-masochism (00:49:35), also suggest the intertwining

(00:49:35-00:49:40, 00:50:07-00:50:14, 00:50:47-00:51:12, 00:55:43-00:57:09<sup>55</sup>) in the old octagonal morgue during/after the forensic autopsy of their victims. Predictably, Ted's twofold induction into the deadly game is marked by alcohol consumption. First, Ted is invited/challenged to participate in the game whilst at the Fourteen Stones bar (00:14:05), over a round of beers and then another of shots. (During the event, the two female doctors, Juliette Bath and Catherine Ivy, engage homoerotically.) On that occasion, Jake invites Ted to go out together the following night, and the film cuts to show the two doctors drinking and driving to the house of Jake's black victim—yet the latter will be subsequently lampooned for dissipation. By confiding dark details of her childhood to him, Juliette blackmails Ted emotionally to help her to procure the team's next case: as a child, Juliette was abused by her father (00:41:03-00:42:28), whom they now offer marijuana "on prescription" and promise further drug dispensation. Either Juliette has deceived Ted about the identity of the fat man—allegedly an alcohol- and drug-addict with a pedophile inclination—or Jake does the next day, when he purportedly restores the truth about Juliette's father, a rich banker (00:48:18-00:48:38). Be that as it may,<sup>56</sup> through her story Juliette offers Ted the "bite" of the forbidden fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, compounded by literally misplaced sex (00:46:10-00:46:43): after murdering the man they have sex, before the dead victim's eyes, in a grim remediation of the Cristian exegesis of the Temptation and Expulsion outcome, i.e., sexuality.

What *Pathology*, like *Cleansed*, demonstrates is that

human beings live with moralities of various kinds, and possess and adopt various moral frameworks (e.g. religious, civil, personal, emotional, etc., not to mention their intersections and intertwining) which they engage and disengage both intentionally and unintentionally, in a strict interplay between morality and violence. There are also private moralities and habits—perceived as fully moral by the agents themselves, which we can call *pseudo-moralities* if we compare them to the translucency of the modern moral frameworks ... (Kantian, utilitarian, religious, ethics of virtues, feminist ethics, and so on). (Magnani 184, original emphasis)<sup>57</sup>

Precisely Lorenzo Magnani's notion of *pseudo-morality* describes *Pathology's* psychopaths' "morality"-driven violence, especially Jake's, against those deemed irredeemably vicious. Like all criminal psychopaths, Jake "display[s] a lack of *our* morality: the *ethicocentric* <sup>58</sup> morality of a civil, cultivated observer" (Magnani 185, original emphasis). Whatever conflicts with Jake's (or Tinker's) rigid personal morality—even where the violent psychopath himself may be displaying comparably immoral conduct—activates his "morality" of killing (or punishing). Notions of deserving punishment reign supreme, however, not only in the case of individual criminal psychopaths like the fictional Jake Gallo (and his team) and Tinker. Rather, they structure Christianity's retributive thinking.

The location of the disused morgue where the residents perform clandestine autopsies may unravel the socio-ethical stakes of Schölermann's medical dystopia. Located in the basement and accessible only

---

of drug- and alcohol-addiction and pathology (as both autopsy and the residents' psychopathy). Quite tellingly, the suggestions produced by the film editing, in this case, tally with the medical description of substance-related psychiatric disorders. All excessive consumption of drugs activates the brain reward system—responsible for behavior reinforcement and memories production—*directly* (as opposed to through adaptive behaviors), thus producing feelings of pleasure, detrimental, nevertheless, to normal activities, which are neglected (DSM-5 481).

<sup>55</sup> In this last case, the film fast-cuts from Jake and Juliette's sado-masochist sex in the mortuary to Ted and Gwen's respectably bourgeois sex at her father's residence.

<sup>56</sup> When subsequently Ted confronts Juliette (in the bar)—"Who was he?"—she answers tongue-in-cheek "Anyone" (*Pathology* 00:48:52-00:49:00).

<sup>57</sup> On a critical historicization of the philosophy of evil, see Magnani (ch. 5, esp. 180-4).

<sup>58</sup> "Analogously to ethnocentrism, ethicocentrism is the tendency to believe that one's ethical framework is centrally important, and the correct meter to measure all other moralities" (Magnani 185, n. 12).

through a long, dimly lit corridor maze, the former hospital mortuary is virtually a dungeon; unsurprisingly, Ted's earliest visit depicts a *descensus ad inferos*. (By contrast, the upstairs pathology rooms are brightly lit laboratories.) Appropriately, the earliest tenants in the dungeon-morgue are the allegedly undeserving individuals, one of whom ends up in hell/incinerator fire (00:50:00-00:50:06). Beyond the religious register, the place stands for the dark unconscious seething with unwholesome drives—Mr. Hyde peeking through, after Dr. Jekyll has swallowed up his potion<sup>59</sup> in a scientific God-game.<sup>60</sup> Dr. Gallo participates nominally too in this dark symbolism, for his first name has more than one resounding cultural ring to it. Jake as Dr. Ja-kyll concealing Mr. Hyde kills three prostitutes, in pure Jack-the-Ripper fashion<sup>61</sup> (hence also the homonymy Jake/Jack), to vent his bloodlust disguised as moral righteousness. Committed after Dr. Morris's party, the latter triple murder is but a pretext to invite Ted at midnight to the *morgue*, subsequently named the *dungeon*,<sup>62</sup> to watch Jake's drunk, orgiastic raving over the prostitutes' cadavers. On the occasion, Ted is lectured on his and Jake's fundamental consubstantiality as killers (*Pathology* 01:04:00-01:05:45). No autopsy ensues. Jake vents his contempt for the murder victims, one of whom he disemboweled (probably alive) to boast scientific but especially masculine (and morally righteous) power-over. Indeed, there is a blatant difference between these three murder victims and Stevenson's. Not *Pathology*'s "scum of the earth" does Edward Hyde kill, with an atavistic "ape-like fury" (Stevenson 22), but MP Sir Danvers Carew. By contrast, the serial killer Jack the Ripper, Hyde's actual replica in 1888 (Mighall, "Diagnosing Jekyll" 157), lurks at night in the corners of Whitechapel, in London's East End, to murder prostitutes and eviscerate them with anatomical precision.

English now uses the phrase "Jekyll-and-Hyde personality" to describe "someone who lives a double-life of outward sanctity and secret iniquity" (Mighall, Introduction ix)—such as *Pathology*'s doctors. In Schölermann's film, the very chronology and spatial juxtaposition of autoptic activities suggests this lethal duplicity. That *Pathology* does not capitalize on Grand Guignol graphic scenes, but highlights the residents' debauchery and alcohol- and drug-addiction, is quite revealing for the persistent moralization bias of western society. The film's title evokes the pathology laboratory as a mere pretext to autopsy, the social pathology of the doctors working there and to decry their "Jekyll-and-Hyde personality"—perhaps not just theirs—thus forged by obnoxious addictions.

## Conclusions

"Sex is worth dying for" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 1, 156), *Cleansed*, *Ex Machina* and *Pathology* suggest, if in dissimilar terms. As Rob's death and Grace's and Carl's mutilation, in *Cleansed*, indicate, "exchang[ing] life in its entirety for sex itself, for the truth and the sovereignty of sex" (Foucault 156) may be a worthwhile channeling of cathectic energy. Defending one's right to libidinal cathexis and sexual choice is paramount when confronted with an overall normative regime espoused and perversely

<sup>59</sup> Theories of the subconscious influenced *Jekyll and Hyde*, as Stevenson's wife Fanny recalled much later (qtd. in Mighall, "Diagnosing Jekyll" 145). See Mighall on "the psychiatric, criminological and sexological literature of the late-Victorian period" (146) which primed Stevenson's "psychological" speculations.

<sup>60</sup> Unlike in Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), the first science fiction novel, in Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* (1886) the scientific God-game is self-aimed. See Mighall's (ix-xvii) introduction to the Gothic tradition within which Stevenson wrote *Jekyll and Hyde*, "The Body Snatcher" (1884) and "Ollala" (1885), responsive to his contemporaries' concern with "social hygiene" or mental pathology (Mighall, Introduction xiii).

<sup>61</sup> Reviewing the contemporary media's psycho-social and moral portrayal of Jack the Ripper, Mighall observes the shift "[f]rom atavistic thug [like Hyde] to respectable individual, and then to a member of the medical profession [like Jekyll]: Jack's metamorphosis reverses Jekyll's" ("Diagnosing Jekyll" 160).

<sup>62</sup> The term appears only once in the film: Ted (*Pathology* 01:08:05) explains to Juliette where Jake had summoned him to show him the three murdered prostitutes.



reinforced by bathetic histrions like Tinker, with their God-play. Indeed, sexual choice may lead to baffling sexual acts that challenge crucial distinctions (e.g., human/machine), as in *Ex Machina*, without also transcending the patriarchal subordination of women to men's discretion or sexual pleasure. However, neither sexual choice, nor sexual acts, do characters in *Ex Machina* and *Pathology* die from, nor even drug overdose, like Kane's Graham, or alcohol-addiction, as Nathan does symbolically. In *Ex Machina*, Nathan dies from misplaced pride and self-confidence, Lucifer's hubris; in *Pathology*, innocent victims and pathologists alike die because of sheer violent insanity of doctors who indulge in God-play. Religious-moral imperatives frame all three works in their exploration of the contemporary gratification-permissiveness. Deeper still, all three works vent anxieties about the duplicity of the human psyche, the hinge between a normative society and deeply personal drives and pleasures. What hides deep within, like Stevenson's Mr. Hyde artificially released in embodied form for the sake of upright moral appearances, may (not) need drugs or alcohol to surface, but perhaps just a constrictive societal regimen to impose spurious inner/outer or acceptable/inacceptable boundaries. It may turn out to be not a sexual "deviant" or substance-addict, but a sadistic *Deus tyrannus*.

### Works Cited

- American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (DSM-5), American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013.
- Baum, L. Frank. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Geo M. Hill, 1900.
- Blume, Arthur W. *Treating Drug Problems*. Wiley, 2005.
- Bolter, Jay David, and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding the New Media*. MIT Press, 1999.
- Bosch, Hieronymus. *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. 1490–1500. Museo del Prado, Madrid. *Museo del Prado, Madrid*, [www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/the-garden-of-earthly-delights-triptych/02388242-6d6a-4e9e-a992-e1311eab3609](http://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/the-garden-of-earthly-delights-triptych/02388242-6d6a-4e9e-a992-e1311eab3609). Accessed 25 Apr. 2018.
- Cook, Christopher C. H. *Alcohol, Addiction and Christian Ethics*. Cambridge UP, 2006.
- Dehner, Louis P. "The Medical Autopsy: Past, Present, and Dubious Future." *Missouri Medicine*, vol. 107, no.2, 2010, pp. 94-100. *NCBI*, pmid:20446515.
- De Vos, Laurens. *Cruelty and Desire in the Modern Theater: Antonin Artaud, Sarah Kane, and Samuel Beckett*. Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2011.
- Eriksson, A. "Forensic Pathology." *Forensic Epidemiology: Principles and Practice*, edited by Michael Freeman and Maurice Zeegers, Academic Press/Elsevier, 2016, pp. 151-77.
- Ex Machina*. Directed and written by Alex Garland, Universal Pictures International, Film4, DNA Films, 2014.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Vintage Books, 1995.
- . *Essential Works, 1954-1984. Vol. 1: Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. Edited by Paul Rabinow, translated by Robert Hurley et al., New Press, 1997.
- . *History of Madness*. Edited by Jean Khalfa, translated by Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa, Routledge, 2006.
- . *The History of Sexuality. Vol. 1: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Pantheon Books, 1978.
- . *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1979-80*. Edited by Arnold I. Davidson, translated by Graham Burcell, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.



- Gorringe, Timothy. *God's Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence and the Rhetoric of Salvation*. Cambridge UP, 1996.
- Henke, Jennifer. "'Ava's Body Is a Good One': (Dis)Embodiment in *Ex Machina*." *American, British and Canadian Studies*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2017, pp. 126-46. DOI: 10.1515/abcsj-2017-0022.
- Hird, Myra J. *Sex, Gender, and Science*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- House M.D.* Directed by Daniel Attias et al. Created by David Shore. Fox TV, 2004–2012.
- Humans*. Directed by Lewis Arnold et al. Written by Sam Vincent et al. Channel 4 and AMC, 2015-.
- Kane, Sarah. *Cleansed*. Methuen, 1998.
- Magnani, Lorenzo. *Understanding Violence: The Intertwining of Morality, Religion and Violence: A Philosophical Stance*. Springer, 2011.
- Mighall, Robert. "Diagnosing Jekyll: The Scientific Context to Dr. Jekyll's Experiment and Mr. Hyde's Embodiment." Stevenson, pp. 145-61.
- . Introduction. Stevenson, pp. ix-xxxviii.
- Newhauser, Richard G. Introduction. *The Seven Deadly Sins: From Communities to Individuals*. Edited by Richard G. Newhauser, Brill, 2007, pp. 1-17.
- The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha (NRSV)*. Edited by Michael D. Coogan, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Oxford UP, 2010.
- Oxford Dictionary Online*. en.oxforddictionaries.com. Accessed 10 Apr. 2018
- The Oxford Latin Dictionary (OLD)*. Edited by P. G. W. Glare et al., Clarendon Press, 1968.
- Ovid. *Ovid in Six Volumes. III: Metamorphoses*. Translated by Frank Justus Miller, vol. 1, Loeb-Harvard UP, 1971. 2 vols.
- Pathology*. Directed by Marc Schölermann. Written by Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Lakeshore Entertainment, Camelot Pictures, 2008.
- Shakespeare, William. *Titus Andronicus*. Edited by John Dover Wilson, Cambridge UP, 1968.
- Stevenson, Robert Louis. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Other Tales of Terror*. Introduction and notes by Robert Mighall, Penguin Classics, 2002.
- van den Tweel, Jan G. and Christian Wittekind. "The Medical Autopsy as Quality Assurance Tool in Clinical Medicine: Dreams and Realities." *VirchowsArchiv*, vol. 468, 2016, pp. 75-81. NCB, doi:10.1007/s00428-015-1833-5.

## Authors

Estella CIOBANU is associate professor at the Faculty of Letters, Ovidius University of Constanța, Romania, where she teaches Identity and Gender in the U.S., Culture and Religion in the U.S., Postmodernism, and British and American Cultural Icons. Her academic interests include iconization studies and gendered representations of the body in literature, medieval theater, cartography, anatomo-medical practices and the arts. She is the author of *Representations of the Body in Middle English Biblical Drama* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), *The Body Spectacular in Middle English Theatre* (Editura Etnologică, 2013), *The Spectacle of the Body in Late Medieval England* (Lumen, 2012), and co-author (with Petru Golban) of *A Short History of Literary Criticism* (Țic Mart Press, 2008).

**Contact:** estella\_ciobanu@yahoo.com

Patricia ȘOITU teaches English and is enrolled in the Anglo-American Studies master's programme of the Faculty of Letters, Ovidius University of Constanța. She has participated in conferences and wishes to further her academic research.

Contact: [soitu.patricia@gmail.com](mailto:soitu.patricia@gmail.com)

© 2018 by the author. Licensee *HyperCultura*, “Hyperion” University, Bucharest, Romania. This is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Wojciech Klepuszewski

Koszalin University of Technology, Poland

## Literary Alcoholics: Debunking the Myth

**Abstract:** It would not be an overstatement to claim that criticism concerning the question of alcoholic writers is heavily bent towards the American literary scene. In fact, American men and women of letters loom large in critical studies focused on the intersection between alcohol and literature, including those which are only partly discussed in literature per se. This would not be problematic as such were it not for the fact that they tend to mythologize alcoholic writers, even if partly unwittingly, often providing an image of a heavy-drinking figure with a typewriter and a bottle of rye whisky as two prerequisites for a successful completion of the creative process. However, as argued in the present article, such an approach may seem appealing to biographers, but is largely irrelevant in terms of considering literary contexts. Much as some writers can draw heavily on their own alcoholic experience, utilizing it in their own works, alcohol(ism) is not a factor which determines literary merit. Neither is it, as some would have it, a reliable stimulant, a writer's muse, as it were. The present article attempts to debunk the myth of alcoholic writers, considering it predominantly a critical stunt which hardly adds anything momentous to the appreciation of literature.

**Keywords:** alcohol, writers, literature, fiction, criticism

### Introduction

Alcohol has often connoted a bohemian style of life, admittedly more in the past than at present. One of the numerous perceptions is that it can be a stimulant to creative work. As Jarosz et al., put it, alcohol, either on its own or combined with other types of intoxicants, "has been linked to the accomplishments of many great individuals including Beethoven, Poe, Hemingway, Coleridge, Pollock, and Socrates" (487). The conviction that alcohol can boost creativity is echoed in various studies. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), the American philosopher, William James goes even further, suggesting that alcohol affects deeper layers of human mind and soul, thus becoming more than just an agent which fosters creativity: "The sway of alcohol over mankind is unquestionably due to its power to stimulate the mystical faculties of human nature, usually crushed to earth by the cold facts and dry criticisms of the sober hour. Sobriety diminishes, discriminates, and says no; drunkenness expands, unites, and says yes" (387).

Such presumably elevating properties of alcohol have been praised in literary works, particularly in poetry. For instance, Charles Baudelaire, in his much-quoted poem in prose, "Be Drunken," advocates the following: "Be always drunken. Nothing else matters: that is the only question. If you would not feel the horrible burden of Time weighing on your shoulders and crushing you to the earth, be drunken continually. Drunken with what? With wine, with poetry, or with virtue as you will. But be drunken" (58).

Obviously, Baudelaire's exhortation has to be read more metaphorically, though he himself strictly adhered to this call, both in terms of alcohol and drugs. There is no doubt that many artists and writers have taken Baudelaire's suggestion to heart, and considered alcohol inspirational, not only as a theme worth pursuing in literature, but also as a personal muse which kindles imagination.

### British Writers and Alcohol

There are copious examples of literary imbibers which can be quoted here. David Pratt, for instance, suggests that some Romantic poets in Britain, his reference including Charles Lamb, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and the Scottish bard Robert Burns, "sought Dionysian inspiration for their poetry" (800). Many literary figures have openly expressed their affection for alcohol, not necessarily linking it to the writing

process, yet not denying such either. A great drink aficionado, P. G. Wodehouse, writes in a letter dated December 24, 1946, that “the greatest thing in life is gin and vermouth” (qtd. in Ratcliffe 399). The very same Wodehouse satirizes temperance in “My Battle with Drink,” the title somewhat misleading at first, but the final sentence most explanatory in this respect: “I drink highballs for breakfast. I am saved” (23). Wodehouse, of course, is just one example among scores of men and, less often, women of letters, most explicit about their affection for drink.

References to drinking writers, particularly in pre-twentieth-century literature, usually portray them as jolly drinkers. John Booth, the editor of *Creative Spirits: A Toast to Literary Drinkers* (1997), includes many such examples, emphasizing that some of the writers’ lives provide enough quotable stories, factual as well as purely anecdotal, for an entire anthology (87). One such writer quoted by Booth is Richard Brinsley Sheridan: “The painter Benjamin Haydon recounted a time when Sheridan and others were dining at Somerset House and were thoroughly enjoying the evening when a servant rushed in, shouting, ‘Sir, the house is on fire!’ ‘Bring another bottle of claret,’ said Sheridan amiably. ‘It is not my house’” (87).

The list of heavy-drinking, or even seriously alcoholic literary figures, is very long, and this certainly applies to different literary landscapes, not just within the field of Anglophone literatures. However, nowhere is the question of writers’ alcoholism so prominently foregrounded as it is in the criticism discussing the American literary scene.

### American Drinking Studies

Critical studies concerning alcoholism among American writers have been mushrooming for decades, with scholars usually approaching the issue from all but literature-oriented angles: biographical, psychological and even medical, a particular perspective often determined by the author’s professional background.<sup>63</sup> This tendency to (over)focus on literary drunkards seems to reveal a conviction that America is a country that has produced a phenomenon of alcoholic writers, famous for their works as well as (in)famous for their alcohol intake. It is rather perplexing to read Alfred Kazin’s observation that “there is something special about the drinking of so many American writers” (44). More so, because in the same passage Kazin admits that “there have been famous literary drunks in other countries—Burns, Swinburne, Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson, Paul Verlaine, and those two fat boys, Dylan Thomas and Evelyn Waugh” (44). However, Kazin’s comment is aimed at emphasizing the magnitude of the American ‘phenomenon’ he refers to, rather than attaching any particular importance to the fact that there are/have been alcoholic writers outside America.<sup>64</sup> Kazin, in fact, seems to rely quite heavily on his conviction that alcohol abuse as such is a distinctively American feature: “America has always been a hard-drinking country despite the many places and times in which alcohol has been forbidden by law” (44). A similar point can be found in William Rorabaugh’s *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (1981), whose very title, as well as, in particular, the chapter titled “A Nation of Drunkards” (3-22), are quite telling, implying that in the context of alcohol, America stands apart.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup> One example is Lewis Hyde, the author of *Alcohol and Poetry* (1996), who reveals his two-year experience as “a counsellor with alcoholics in the detoxification ward of a city hospital” (1). Another one is Donald Goodwin, a psychiatrist specializing in the genetics of alcoholism, the author of numerous articles on the subjects of alcoholic writers, as well as a more extensive study, *Alcohol and the Writer* (1988).

<sup>64</sup> In the introduction to *Bacchus in Romantic England* (1999: 1-4) Anya Taylor observes that there has been a focus on modern American writers, while there is plenty of material to be found elsewhere, for instance, in the lives and works of Romantic writers in England.

<sup>65</sup> Taking it more humorously, one might quote Kingsley Amis, himself a literary boozier, who once remarked: “Nationalism. The American habit of taking credit for everything” (qtd. in Fieldhouse 52). Admittedly, though, taking credit for various achievements, drinkwise as well, can be contagious. Henry Jeffreys, for instance, in his *Empire of Booze* (2016) boasts that Britain is the country with “the greatest influence on wine and drink” (1).

There are several assumptions constituting the mythos of American literary alcoholics, by and large fallacious. Kazin, as mentioned above, suggests that there is some sort of special interface between drink and writing which is quite unparalleled in the case of American writers. One of the arguments reiterated by Kazin and other critics is the number of alcohol-dependent writers who won the Nobel Prize in literature (Kazin 44; Hyde 1). Donald Goodwin's calculation is that about 70 percent of the American Nobel Prize winners were actual alcoholics (*Alcohol and the Writer* 12). However, this computation hardly proves more than a coincidence, much as the Nobel Prizes for Samuel Beckett or William Golding, both known for drinking to excess, do not tell us anything vital about Irish and British literature in the context of drinking writers. As Albert Rothenberg quite rightly notices in his comment upon the number of American alcoholic writers, "[a]lthough this is a striking list, it proves nothing by itself" (75).

Another typical feature of the studies concerning American writers is a tendency to expound what might be called 'indigenous' determinants. Discussing Faulkner, for instance, Kazin explains that he "drank because it was a habit in the Deep South for men to drink" (47). However, this does not add anything important in terms of qualifying Faulkner's alcoholism, and neither does it help in establishing a vital link between his addiction and his literary output. The very same applies to situating Prohibition in this context, as there are numerous attempts to interrelate it with the writers' alcoholism to prove that it had a singular impact on the point in question.<sup>66</sup> However, much as Prohibition is of considerable importance from a socio-cultural point of view, and looms large in publications concerning America and alcohol, it influenced all Americans, not just writers, so the special connection is rather far-fetched.<sup>67</sup>

### Why Writers Drink

What seems to be most obsessive in the criticism concerning American writers is what Goodwin calls a "persistent analytical question," namely finding an explanation for, in his belief, high rate of alcohol abuse among American writers (*Alcohol and the Writer* 6). There are of course many potential determinants here, mostly to do with the insecurity connected with publishing one's work, which, particularly in the American competitive market, is an aspect worth considering. The problem of publishers' acceptance is just one step of the ladder, as there is a risk of pungent criticism which can deflate and dispirit the author; finally, the reader, whose cold reception can be the proverbial final nail. Much as these problems can contribute to drinking or heavy-drinking, there are critical studies whose authors enumerate various other factors, undoubtedly logical and convincing, though most of them can easily be applied to a number of other professions, in which case the discussion should concern alcoholism in general, rather than that of literary figures. Donald Goodwin, for instance, claims that writing is an exhibitionist act, and, consequently, writers need to lower inhibitions and boost self-confidence. While this may be true of confessional writing, it seems less convincing as far as writing fiction is concerned. By the same token, Goodwin's claim that writing requires interest in people, and alcohol increases sociability, seems an oversimplification because such interest does not necessarily entail being extremely gregarious, not to mention the fact that sociability is not dependent on drinking.

Other debatable points in Goodwin's discussion include alcohol as an agent which helps to concentrate and increases creativity ("Alcohol as Muse" 6, 12). The 'creativity factor' is a recurrent issue in the debate on writers and alcohol, but probably nowhere blown up to such absurdity as in Anthony Lukas's article, in which he quotes a playwright with Alcoholics Anonymous experience: "Alcoholics are great fantasizers. I

<sup>66</sup> A good example is *Drinking in America: Our Secret History* (2015) by Susan Cheever, which contains a chapter titled "Prohibition" (141-157). Cheever's book, in large part concentrates on drinking writers, and on various factors which, according to Cheever, turned them to drinking.

<sup>67</sup> It is also worth remembering that prohibition as such was not an American invention. There is a whole list of countries which introduced such measures, including the pre-communist Russia in 1914, Norway in 1917, or Finland in 1919.

suspect that's what makes so many of them writers, or vice versa" (nytimes). This actually suggests a potentially new area of critical analysis, namely alcoholics who become writers. However, Lukas's article does not give any examples in this matter, so it can only be considered as an extreme form of hypothesizing. The best answer to the various voices trying to marry drinking with creativity comes from Ring Lardner, another American writer 'chained' to a bottle, who once said to his son "No one, ever, wrote anything as well after even one drink as he would have done without it" (165).

Surprisingly, Lukas's example is not a singular one, as there are numerous other voices which appear somewhat preposterous. Ann Waldron, for instance, equates solitude with drinking: "Writers are loners and therefore drinkers" (washingtonpost). Indeed, it is indisputable that writing is a solitary act, and the recourse to alcohol can be considered as an option by some writers, but on the whole, this is a very simplistic assumption, especially that one can provide examples of writers who do not fit Waldron's category. After all, how to rate the British and Irish writers, Kingsley Amis and Brendan Behan, or, as the discussion focuses on American literature, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, all of whom were confirmed socializers. Even though Charles Lamb belongs to a much earlier time frame, it is worth quoting his own reflections, particularly that he too is an example of a literary imbibor:

I had lived from the period of leaving school to that time pretty much in solitude. My companions were chiefly books, or at most one or two living ones of my own book-loving and sober stamp. I rose early, went to bed betimes, and the faculties which God had given me, I have reason to think, did not rust in me unused. About that time I fell in with some companions of a different order. They were men of boisterous spirits, sitters up a-nights, disputants, drunken. (58)

However, not all critical works indulge in discussions which blur, rather than sharpen the picture. Lucy Robe, for instance, in *Co-Starring: Famous Women and Alcohol* (1986), in which she focuses on celebrated actors, singers, and writers, draws conclusions which run contrary to some of the opinions quoted earlier. In the entry on Jane Bowles, Robe explains that Bowles "used the classic excuse of writer's block," but in reality, drinking was the key factor which in her case led to writer's block (312). This is one of many examples which debunk the myth of alcohol-induced creativity and prove that in practice drinking and writing do not meet to generate great works of literature. As Rothenberg explains in his discussion on alcoholism and creativity, mainly among American writers, only few of them wrote, or even thought about writing when they were under the influence (76). Similarly, Douglas Day, in his biography of Malcolm Lowry, observes that Lowry had a system in which he "drank in order to avoid writing, sobered up in order to write, then drank in order to avoid writing" (30).

## Conclusions

Discussing the question of alcoholic writers is certainly interesting from a biographical point of view. Sometimes, as in the case of Charles Jackson or Patrick Hamilton, it can shed additional light on the literary output, if only because their fiction echoes their own experiences. However, the continuous flow of publications which focus on American alcoholic writers,<sup>68</sup> the insistence on revisiting their lives over and over again does not seem to be more than perpetuating a myth. It is generally based on the premise that the number of famous American authors dependent on alcohol is a phenomenon in itself, and requires an in-depth analysis, particularly focusing on the link between drinking and creativity. Richard Smith parallels crime and literature, claiming wittily that "[t]he annals of literature contain as many drunkards as the prisons" (1697). However, his conclusion that alcohol which "inspires one man to knock an old lady stupid

<sup>68</sup> One of the latest, though, predictably, not the last one, is Olivia Laing's *The Trip to Echo Spring: Why Writers Drink* (2013).



may inspire another to write immortal lines" (1697) is merely a fashionable one-liner, for writers become alcoholics just the same as most people do, certainly not in order to give birth to a great literary work. One thing which cannot be denied, as John Crowley observes discussing alcoholic writers in America, is that "drinking had a crucial effect on their literary fortunes and misfortunes" (x). Obviously, heavy drinking, almost by definition has an effect to this end, both in a personal and a professional dimension, but this said, it is a comment pertaining to anyone who abuses alcohol, not just writers.

The available studies on American alcoholic writers are familiarly repetitive: they mention the same authors, and take similar vantage points. A good example is Susan Cheever, the daughter of John Cheever, a great writer and a comparably great alcoholic. Susan wrote a whole cycle of books which feature her father's as well as her own drinking.<sup>69</sup> Yet, much as in most studies and critical works, the focus is biographical, rather than literary. This is quite a characteristic feature—focalizing, or even mythologizing alcoholic writers in the American literary canon by and large excludes any interest in literature per se. Quite surprisingly, because after all, alcohol is thematized by writers far more often than it becomes their own problem, the proof of which is available in hundreds of literary works. More to the point, the multifarious representations of alcohol in literature offer a whole range of areas worth exploring. James Nicholls, for instance, proposes a "thematic and methodological approach" (9), dissecting such points as the "social carnival of drinking" (10), "drinking and national identity" (16), the "figure of the alcoholic," or discussing alcohol as a "symbol of personal dysfunction" (17). This is exactly what is missing in the debate concerning drinking writers in America, which follows what seems a fashionable myth, rather than what is of genuine importance, that is literary legacy, written by non-drinking as well as heavily-dependent writers.

#### Works cited:

- Baudelaire, Charles. *Poems in Prose*. Translated by Arthur Symons, Elkin Mathews, 1913.
- Booth, John, ed. *Creative Spirits: A Toast to Literary Drinkers*. André Deutsch, 1997.
- Cheever, Susan. *Drinking in America: Our Secret History*. Grand Central Publishing, 2015.
- Crowley, John William. *The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction*. University of Massachusetts Press, 1994.
- Day, Douglas. *Malcolm Lowry: A Biography*. Oxford University Press, 1973.
- Fieldhouse, Harry. "Penthouse Interview: Kingsley Amis." *Conversations with Kingsley Amis*, edited by Thomas DePietro, University Press of Mississippi, 2009, pp. 46-58.
- Goodwin, Donald W. *Alcohol and the Writer*. Andrews and McMeel, 1988.
- . "Alcohol as Muse." *Dionysos*, vol 5, no. 1, 1993, pp.3-14.
- Hyde, Lewis. *Alcohol and Poetry: John Berryman and the Booze Talking*. Dallas Institute Publications, 1986.
- James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. Longmans, Green and Co., 1902.
- Jarosz, Andrew F., et al. "Uncorking the Muse: Alcohol Intoxication Facilitates Creative Problem Solving." *Consciousness and Cognition*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2012, pp. 487-493.
- Jeffreys, Henry. *Empire of Booze: British History through the Bottom of a Glass*. Unbound, 2016.
- Kazin, Alfred. "'The Giant Killer': Drink and the American Writer." *Commentary*, March 1976, pp. 44-50.

<sup>69</sup> The books include *My Name Is Bill—Bill Wilson: His Life and the Creation of Alcoholics Anonymous* (2015), a biography of William Griffith Wilson, a cofounder of Alcoholics Anonymous; *Home Before Dark* (1984) a memoir about her father, John Cheever; *Treetops: A Family Memoir* (1991); *Note Found in a Bottle: My Life as a Drinker* (1999); and *Desire: Where Sex Meets Addiction* (2008), in which Cheever not only touches upon alcoholism, but also on her own compulsive promiscuity.

- Lamb, Charles. *The Essays of Elia*. London: E. Moxon, 1841.
- Lardner, Ring Jr. *The Lardners: My Family Remembered*. Harper & Row, 1976.
- Lukas, Anthony J. "One Too Many for the Muse." *The New York Times*, 1 December 1985, p 007001, [www.nytimes.com/1985/12/01/books/one-too-many-for-the-muse.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1985/12/01/books/one-too-many-for-the-muse.html)  
Accessed 14 June 2018.
- Nicholls, James. "Introduction." *A Babel of Bottles: Drink, Drinkers and Drinking Places in Literature*, edited by James Nicholls and Susan J. Owen, Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.
- Pratt, David C. "Role of Alcohol in Literature." *The Sage Encyclopedia of Alcohol: Social, Cultural, and Historical Perspective*, edited by Scott Christopher Martin, SAGE Publications, 2015, pp. 798-804.
- Ratcliffe, Sophie, ed. *P. G. Wodehouse: A Life in Letters*. Norton & Norton, 2013.
- Robe, Lucy Barry. *Co-Starring: Famous Women and Alcohol*. CompCare Publications, 1986.
- Rorabaugh, W.J. *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition*. Oxford University Press, 1981.
- Rothenberg, Albert. "Creativity, Mental Health, and Alcoholism." *Eminent Creativity, Everyday Creativity, and Health*, edited by Mark A. Runco and Ruth Richards, Ablex Publishing, 1997, pp. 65-96.
- Smith, Richard. "The Pen and the Bottle." *British Medical Journal*, vol. 287, 1983, pp. 1697-1698.
- Taylor, Anya. *Bacchus in Romantic England: Writers and Drink 1780-1830*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1999.
- Waldron, Ann. "Writers and Alcohol." *The Washington Post*, 14 March 1989, [www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/wellness/1989/03/14/writers-and-alcohol/6a02f1c2-b1c3-409b-a42b-04d7d23f50d3/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.de499483e97c](http://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/wellness/1989/03/14/writers-and-alcohol/6a02f1c2-b1c3-409b-a42b-04d7d23f50d3/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.de499483e97c).  
Accessed 22 May 2018.
- Wodehouse, P.G. *A Wodehouse Miscellany: Articles and Stories*. The Floating Press, 2011.

#### Author:

Wojciech KLEPUSZEWSKI is a graduate of Gdansk University, where he obtained his Ph.D. in Literary Studies. He teaches at the Faculty of Humanities, Koszalin University of Technology, Poland. His latest research focuses on the field of drinking studies, particularly drink literature. His latest publication is *The Proof Is in the Writing: Kingsley Amis's Literary Distillations* (2018, in print). He is also the co-editor of *Booze as a Muse: A Literary and Cultural Perspective* (due in 2018).

**Contact:** [klepuszewski@poczta.pl](mailto:klepuszewski@poczta.pl)

© 2018 by the author. Licensee *HyperCultura*, "Hyperion" University, Bucharest, Romania. This is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

**Manisha Bhattacharya**

Raja Peary Mohan College, Uttarpara, India

## Book Review: *The Red-Haired Woman* by Orhan Pamuk

### Reviewed work:

Orhan Pamuk, *The Red-Haired Woman*, Yapi Kredi Yayinlari, Istanbul, 2016, Penguin Random House, India, 2017, translated in English by Ekin Oklap, 253 p.

One's future peeps through the polyvocal layers of past, which will make one confront the grim truth of life without any possible escape. Life and the stories it produces are not so unfamiliar to us, rather we read novels with the expectation of such outcome. However, their form should revolve around a kind of regression or be decorated with a psychological history. One such instance is *Oedipus Rex* written by Sophocles in 429 BC, and the other is *The Red-Haired Woman* (2016), the Nobel Prize winner, Orhan Pamuk's tenth novel. The chronological difference between the two texts was obliterated by Pamuk himself by using *Oedipus Rex* or *Oedipus the King* as one of the three epigraphs: 'OEDIPUS: Where would a trace of this old crime be found?' The other two are: one from Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) on the myth of Oedipus and one from Persian poet Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* (between c. 977 and 1010 CE). In the light of these epigraphs, Pamuk's novel remains indomitable in handling the questions of patricide and paternal filicide.

Sophocles' *Oedipus* was also an inevitable part of *The Good Story: Exchanges on Truth, Fiction and Psychotherapy* (2015)—a collection by writer J. M. Coetzee and psychotherapist Arabella Kurtz. In the words of Coetzee and Kurtz, "*Oedipus Rex* combines the two forms: Oedipus is both the owner of the buried past and the detective [...] the story is about the futility of trying to escape from one's past, of trying to reinvent oneself. The past refuses to be buried" (85).

Pamuk's novel is a memorandum of an excavation of that buried past. It is about a kind of trauma and forgetting. *The Red-Haired Woman* is divided into three parts. In the first part, narrator Cem Çelik, abandoned by his father, decides to become an apprentice of a well-digger, Master Mahmut, in the fictional town of Öngören, a down-at-heel military base outside Istanbul, leaving his mother at home. Mahmut becomes his guide and commander. The act of digging a well to make a barren land fertile makes them bond well. And the construction of the well finds resonance with building up the wall in Paul Auster's *The Music of Chance* (1990). That metaphor of the well is also found in Haruki Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (1997): a place for the manifestation of divine truth where Toru, the protagonist, retreats to gain a perspective of the world.

Cem, who has always been deprived of his father's love finds a retreat in Mahmut. When he hears his master addressing him as "little gentleman," (Pamuk 22) he realizes: "Those two words told me that Master Mahmut knew my family was educated city folk, which meant he would look out for me as a father and not burden me with the heavier tasks. They made me feel that he cared about me and took an interest in my life" (22). Mahmut becomes his foster-father. In Cem's words, "the enigma of fathers and sons" (3) is redundant and pivotal here. Hence the third epigraph from *Shahnameh* goes like: "As a fatherless son, so a sonless father will be embraced by none" (2)—where the brave Rustum mistakenly kills his son, Sohrab. This is contradictory to the story of Oedipus. They gaze at each other holding two extremist positions in Pamuk's novel.

Mahmut and Cem have only one form of entertainment: to go to the market of Öngören in order to buy groceries and cigarettes. It is the public space where they can get away from their cocoons and there appears a tinge of 'The Theatre of Morality Tales,' the imminent presence of the 'red-haired woman.' She reminds us of the last lines of Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus": "Out of the ash/I rise with my red hair/And I eat men like air" (poetryfoundation). Red-haired women are inflammable, tempestuous and passionate. Pamuk's eponymous woman is not different either: she is enticing, alluring, and mystique; her subsequent acts stain Cem's life forever. As the narrator says, "But just as she [red-haired woman] was stepping back into the house, she glanced at me and the elderly horse behind me. A melancholy smile formed on her perfectly curved lips, as if she'd seen something unusual in me or the horse. She was tall, her smile unexpectedly sweet and tender" (200). However, she is not the protagonist; rather her role in the final section of the novel is that of a catalyst. She is an integral part of the complacent relationship between father and son. A night in the life of the narrator will lead him to the opposite thread: the traditional and modern will meet at one point through the resurrection of the past. Pamuk's arraying of the narrative never for once makes it look unrealistic. Unlike Pamuk's last two novels, *A Strangeness in My Mind* (2014) and *The Museum of Innocence* (2008), this novel has a fable-like texture to it which is unprecedented.

The red-haired woman, on the one hand gives Cem happiness and identity: "The-red haired woman showed me who I was, and what happiness meant" (205) and Mahmut, his surrogate father, on the other, provides him with love and sustenance. But Cem moves away from both attractions. Leaving the injured Mahmut alone inside the well, he runs away towards Öngören; nevertheless, the Gypsy band where this lady belongs has already deserted the place. His shame and guilt are lurking underneath, trying to spew out in light. He leaves the place in search of a peaceful life. And thus, the first part ends.

In the second part, Cem becomes a successful geologist, married but childless, engrossed in the study of *Oedipus* and of the Sohrab-Rustum relationship. The subject of patricide and paternal filicide is recurrent. But Cem is ensnared by events of the distant past; he has to come back to Öngören, from where it has all started. At this juncture, a question should be posed to the readers: is Cem really a sonless father?

The third part of the novel is narrated by the red-haired woman herself who reminds us of Pamuk's eminent novel *The White Castle* (1990) where there is also a shifting of narrator at the end. Any political turmoil or disputed idea is not the ethos of *The Red-Haired Woman*; rather it is a narrative of human relations, myth, and morality. In the epilogue of *The White Castle*, Pamuk wrote (collected from Pamuk's *Other Colours*, 1999): "There are some novels that, though they might come to a satisfying finish, contain characters who continue their adventures in the author's dreams" (35). The story of *The Red-Haired Woman* does not have a definite closure; it creates a space for a new beginning.

### Works Cited:

- Coetzee, J.M. and Arabella Kurtz. *The Good Story: Exchanges on Truth, Fiction and Psychotherapy*. Penguin Books, 2015.
- Pamuk, Orhan. *Other Colours: Essays and a Story*. Penguin Random House, 1999.
- . *The Red-Haired Woman*. Translated by Ekin Oklap, Penguin Random House, 2017.
- Plath, Sylvia. "Lady Lazarus." *Poetry Foundation*, [www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49000/lady-lazarus](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49000/lady-lazarus). Accessed 20 May 2018.

**Author**

Manisha BHATTACHARYA is guest lecturer at Raja Peary Mohan College, Uttarpara, Kolkata, West Bengal, India. Her interest lays in the broad area of Victorian literature, and literature of nineteenth-century colonial Bengal particularly the novels and the journals of these periods. She tries to take a holistic approach by combining textual analysis, socio-economic, cultural and historical context, and feminist issues.

**Contact:** manishabhr.bhattacharya@gmail.com

© 2018 by the author. Licensee *HyperCultura*, “Hyperion” University, Bucharest, Romania. This is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Wojciech Klepuszewski

Koszalin University of Technology, Poland

## Book Review: *Pięćdziesiątka* by Inga Iwasiów

### Reviewed work:

Inga Iwasiów, *Pięćdziesiątka*, Wielka Litera, 2015. 285 pg.

Female-authored fictionalization of alcoholic women is not novel, though, admittedly, not frequent either. Most examples can be found in Anglophone literatures, Dorothy Parker's *Big Blonde* and some of Jean Rhys' fiction being good examples. Apart from fiction, the theme has also been focalized in numerous alcoholic/recovery memoirs, such as Caroline Knapp's *Drinking: A Love Story* (1999) or Rosie Boycott's *A Nice Girl like Me: A Story of the Seventies* (1984).

As far as Polish literature is concerned, thematizing alcoholism is a domain occupied by men, both in terms of the authors and the fictional characters, the latter usually depicted as 'drowning their sorrows,' particularly in the post-1945 literature, written during the communist period. In recent years, however, there have been several attempts by female writers to write about alcohol-dependent women: Barbara Kosmowska's *Gobelin* (2002), Patrycja Pustkowiak's *Nocne Zwierzęta* (2013), and, one of the latest, Inga Iwasiów's *Pięćdziesiątka* (2015).

Inga Iwasiów is a scholar specializing in literary studies, but her interest in literature extends to being a writer herself. Although *Pięćdziesiątka* is Iwasiów's fifth novel, it conspicuously resembles her earlier fiction, mainly because all her protagonists are women, but also because her writing seems to be, in part at least, autobiographical. Although it is not obvious whether Iwasiów merges facts with fictive elements, or merely allows her female protagonists to recount their own fictional biographies, there are telltale signs in favour of the former. For instance, in most of Iwasiów's fiction the setting is her home city of Szczecin, and in two of her earlier novels, *Ku Słońcu* (2010) and *Na Krótko* (2012), the main characters are academics, much as Iwasiów herself.

The title of Iwasiów's novel is a play on words, for the eponymous *pięćdziesiątka* refers to being fifty, but also denotes a 50 ml measure of a vodka shot. The novel's central character, Małgorzata, is a recovering alcoholic approaching her fiftieth birthday, the occasion used here for an extended résumé, as it were, of her alcoholic past and sobering present. At the time of writing the novel Iwasiów was reaching the same age as her protagonist, but without knowing anything about Iwasiów's personal relationship with alcohol, one can only speculate whether the novel is a fictionalized memoir, in which she veils some of her own experience.

Considering the fact that *Pięćdziesiątka* is not a singular example of fictionalizing women and alcohol, one would naturally expect more than a compilation of stock images which alcoholism connotes. Unfortunately, this is not the case, and instead the novel reiterates clichéd depictions one can find in numerous writings on the theme. There is no compulsive charge offering the reader insights into an alcoholic frame of mind. The first apparent problem is the obsessive focus on what could be labelled as the physicalities of alcoholism. In her study on drinking, Marty Roth observes that "intoxication is visible [and] addiction is invisible" (xvii). It seems that Iwasiów concentrates on the former, expounding what is most noticeable at the expense of dissecting the hidden nature of 'the beast.' As a result, the novel is



virtually packed with minute details concerning drinking and sobering routines, the latter very much revolving around implant therapies undertaken by Małgorzata.

However, while the sobering-up narrative is fairly lightweight, the graphic depictions of binge drinking, followed by detailed reports on the alcohol-induced sickness, are quite the opposite: "So I hated puking, but got used to it. It is an element of personal hygiene in one's drunken life. An indispensable part of a drunkard's biography" (118).<sup>70</sup>

Such 'vomitorial' references are abundant in the novel, occasionally taking more extreme forms, as in "puking on one's own piss yellowing in a white toilet bowl" (51). Paradoxically, this ever-present vomiting in the novel does not reflect the real nature of alcoholism, because in fact it is a feature characteristic of people who are not seasoned drinkers, so in this respect Iwasiów's representation is somewhat incorrect.

Another problem with *Pięćdziesiątka* is the plotline. Iwasiów utilizes the fact that Małgorzata is approaching her fiftieth birthday in order to insert flashbacks to her past, including childhood. While this can be a cunning device in portraying alcoholic characters, superbly employed by such masters of thematizing alcohol as Charles Jackson (*The Lost Weekend*, 1944) and Kingsley Amis (*The Folks That Live on the Hills*, 1990), in Iwasiów's case such recollections are lengthy and often remotely consistent with the context. The very few alcohol-related memories are rather perfunctory. Some of them include schooldays and the first experiments with cheap wine ("The apple plonk caused sudden vomiting, particularly when combined with sweets"; Iwasiów 35), or various strategies to access 'the forbidden fruit': "We started serious drinking from emptying the drinks cabinet. I opened it one morning instead of going to school" (105). Most often, however, the reader has to do with irrelevant fillers, a prime example to be found in the protagonist's reminiscences of being a teacher of English. Here, quite inexplicably, Iwasiów inserts whole chunks of English texts used by Małgorzata in her classes, texts which, even more absurdly, are subsequently translated into Polish (138).

Finally, Iwasiów's tendency to focus on the 'technical' details of alcohol abuse. For instance, she feeds the reader with lists of alcoholic beverages, as if it were axiomatic that writing about alcoholism required a great number of such particulars. Thus, in passages depicting Małgorzata's youth in the pre-1989 communist Poland, there appear home-made fruit liqueurs of different types (163), and the then officially available beverages, all produced in the Eastern Bloc, such as the Bulgarian Sophia wines and the Hungarian Egri Bikavér, along with Yugoslavian and Bulgarian vermouths (35). When Małgorzata refers to the later phases of her alcoholism, this 'compendium' extends to whisky, brandy, gin, Campari, Passoã (36), and various other drinks she comes across during her foreign travels, of which Margaret's ultimate choice is "an umbrella drink" (197-199). Much in the same vein, Iwasiów focuses on what might be called the logistics of alcoholism: binges, benders, blackouts, alcohol-propelled promiscuity, and the like. In fact, *Pięćdziesiątka* is flooded with such references. Were it not for the fact that they are blown out of proportion, they could function as a kind of staffage, a background landscape, complementary, but not superfluous as is the case.

Despite the promising title, *Pięćdziesiątka* disappoints, not only because it is not a compelling reading as such, but, more importantly, because it is generally lacking in deeper reflections, and fails to present an insightful dissection of alcoholism. Iwasiów does occasionally try to employ a more philosophical perspective, exemplified in lines such as "an island of temperance drifting in the sea of spirits" (148), but stylistic exercises of this kind hardly break new ground as far as fictionalizing alcoholism is concerned. To Iwasiów's credit, she does render some of the economic and cultural peripherality characteristic of the pre-1989 Poland, the former manifested, for instance, in shortages of goods, alcohol included. However, as portraying the zeitgeist of the communist era in Poland is not the essential focus of the novel, its value in the context is limited.

<sup>70</sup> All translations are mine.

If one takes into account the possibility of *Pięćdziesiątka* being semi-autobiographical, the conclusion can only be that regardless of whether a novelist writes from alcoholic experience or has never personally approximated such a problem is irrelevant, for after all what counts is the quality of the fictional representation. A writer with a drinking problem can produce a heart-rending account of addiction, much the same as one with no such background.<sup>71</sup> Conversely, both can fail.

#### Works Cited:

Iwasiów, Inga. *Pięćdziesiątka*. Wielka Litera, 2015.

Roth, Marty. *Drunk the Night Before: An Anatomy of Intoxication*. University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

#### Author:

Wojciech KLEPUSZEWSKI is a graduate of Gdansk University, where he obtained his Ph.D. in Literary Studies. He teaches at the Faculty of Humanities, Koszalin University of Technology, Poland. His latest research focuses on the field of drinking studies, particularly drink literature. His latest publication is *The Proof Is in the Writing: Kingsley Amis's Literary Distillations* (2018, in print). He is also the co-editor of *Booze as a Muse: A Literary and Cultural Perspective* (due in 2018).

**Contact:** [klepuszewski@poczta.pl](mailto:klepuszewski@poczta.pl)

© 2018 by the author. Licensee *HyperCultura*, "Hyperion" University, Bucharest, Romania. This is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

---

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, A.L. Kennedy's excellent novel *Paradise* (2004).